

The Esoteric Tarot

Ancient Sources Rediscovered in Hermeticism and Cabala



RONALD DECKER

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To Charlotte, *sine qua non*

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Introduction

No explanation is known to have accompanied the original Tarot. This book presents an interpretation that will surprise most Tarotists (those who are esoterists) and most academics (those who are critics of the esoterists). My theory covers the evolution of the Tarot, the connotations of its symbols, the symbols' sources, and their transmission to the proper places at the proper times. In truly ancient references, I have found forgotten patterns that are definitely congruent with the Tarot. I will treat not merely isolated motifs, but symbolic systems, and not merely systems, but symmetrical systems. I hope to establish the meanings of the Tarot as it was understood by its inventor(s). Granted, my arguments require deductions and inferences. This is currently necessary because of the scarcity of hard evidence. I welcome improvements to my theory. It offers many points from which further research can proceed.

The following definition is typical of standard dictionaries:

Tarot (TAR-o, ta-RO) *noun* [French < Middle French < Old Italian *tarocco* (plural: *tarocchi*)] a set of cards depicting certain allegories and providing a deck for oracles and games.

GAMES

Some Tarotists, especially in the English-speaking world, may be unaware that Europeans use the Tarot deck for playing a game. It is a trick-taking game with wide variations. The rules have been thoroughly researched, notably by Michael Dummett.¹ Prior to his publications, many Tarotists avoided discussing the Tarot in the context of game playing. It seemed too

mundane and incompatible with their idea of the Tarot as a divinatory implement and a venerable relic.

In antique Tarot decks and in most modern editions, two sets of cards are discernible. One set is comparable to common playing cards and has 56 cards aligned as 4 suits. The suits are identified by emblems: Batons, Cups, Swords, Coins. In standard Tarots, each suit has numeral cards, Ace through Ten, with their values displayed in configurations of suit-signs. Each suit has court cards (Page, Knight, Queen, King). The common cards have been augmented by a set of allegories, usually 22 of them. They are arranged in a hierarchy of 21, plus a special card, the Fool, which can be unnumbered or marked 22 or 0. In the earliest examples, the cards have no numbers to specify the hierarchy. It had to be memorized. For the game of Tarot, the allegories serve as trumps, more powerful than any suit card. The Fool is special: it can be played in lieu of a suit card or a trump but cannot win a trick.

Modern research proves conclusively that the aforementioned suits evolved prior to the trumps. The 4-suit deck (ca. 1345) was imported from the Muslim Middle East to Christian Europe. That deck was the general model for the suits, except that the imports had only three court figures, all male. Europeans sometimes added the rank of Queen. In north Italy (ca. 1440), courtiers also added the trump cards to create the Tarot. The first version seems to have had only 14 trumps. The full complement and the Fool were added before 1470. In the antique examples, the trumps are always found in tandem with the suits.

As the Tarot diffused across Italy, different locales adopted somewhat different game rules, trump hierarchies, and trump imagery. Which rendering is the likely original? I can only affirm that my theory is best fulfilled by the so-called *Tarot de Marseille* ([figure 0.1](#)).

ORACLES

Tarot divination, as we know it today, did not emerge until the 1700s. It was first mentioned by a Parisian fortuneteller, Etteilla, whom we will meet in my concluding chapters. For the numeral cards in his Tarot, he

adapted his previous use of a local deck having the French suit-signs (Diamonds, Hearts, Spades, Clubs). But how had those cards acquired their key meanings? I eventually will discuss the exiguous evidence for a lost system extracted from the Jewish cabala. Etteilla sought cabalistic influence in the trump cards, too. He knew variations of the *Tarot de Marseille*, but he completely altered some of the trump subjects and forced their hierarchy into a new order. He insinuated Egyptian motifs. For instance, his World trump includes two pyramids flanking Isis, the Egyptian personification of Nature. Etteilla referred to the trumps as “major hieroglyphs,” the suit-cards as “minor hieroglyphs.”

ALLEGORIES

We know of two of Etteilla’s contemporaries, Court de Gébelin and the Comte de Mellet, who also studied the *Tarot de Marseille* and theorized that it combined Egyptian mythology and Jewish cabalism. Those syncretic theories doubtless emerged from some underground trend, but not an authentic heritage descending directly from ancient Egypt. De Mellet divided the trump sequence into allegories concerning three stages of societal decline: the Ages of Gold, Silver, and Iron. (That formula did not originate in Egypt but, I suppose, could have become known there through contact with the Hindus, Persians, Greeks, or Romans.) De Mellet was the first author to dub the Tarot as a “Book of Thoth,” referring to the Egyptian god of magic and mysticism. Etteilla used the same title for his divinatory decks, both his common French deck and his uncommon Tarot. De Gébelin pretended to explain the trumps as illustrating some Egyptian story of Creation. Critics have assumed that the emphasis on Egypt was calculated to accommodate an eighteenth-century fad. The tendency to revive Egyptian ideas, images, and artifacts has occurred frequently enough for historians to give it a special term: “Egyptomania.” By the 1770s, the privileged classes in Europe were seeing Egyptomania in furnishings for homes, gardens, and tombs, as well as paintings by Hubert Robert, prints by Piranesi, sculptures by Clodion, plus various ballets, operas, plays, and initiation rites in secret societies. (De Gébelin had

joined several groups devoted to the “occult sciences” and enamored of Egyptian style.)

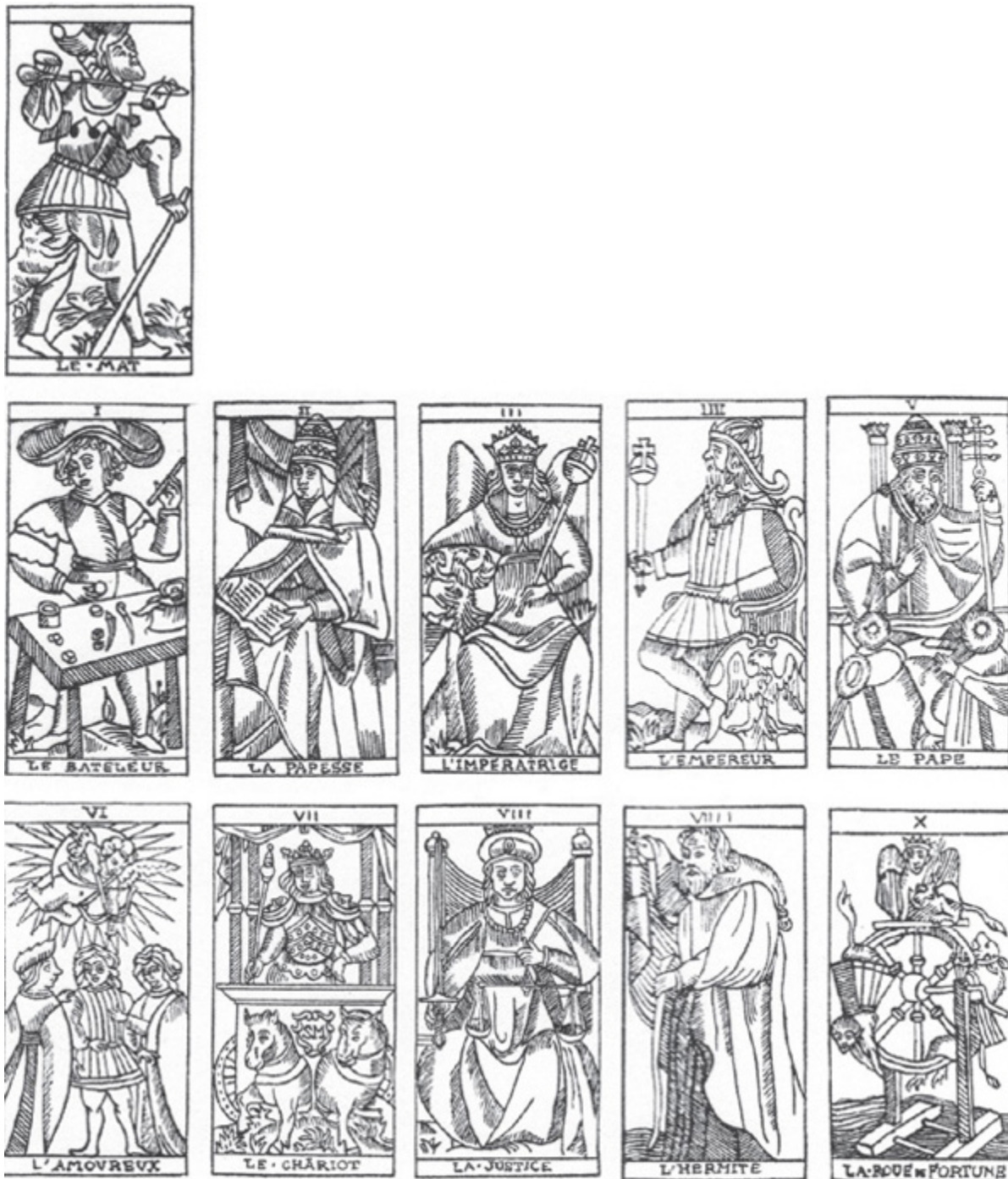


Figure 0.1. *Tarot de Marseille*, redrawn from woodcut Tarot by Nicolas Conver, Marseilles, 1760. (Courtesy of Lehner, 1956; see bibliography.)



De Gébelin, de Mellet, and Etteilla were creative but incompetent in their scholarship. We now know that cards did not exist in dynastic Egypt or in medieval Europe when the cabala commenced. Yet the Tarot's Egypto-cabalistic interpretation gained ardent adherents, enough to generate more books and a succession of Tarots in Egyptian style, often garnished with hieroglyphs. Some modern Tarotists variously bolster the

Egyptomania and the pseudo-cabalism. The Egyptian magicians and Jewish mystics are currently asked to share credit with Sufi masters, Samaritans, Rosicrucians, Hindus, early Freemasons, Eleusinian hierophants, worshipers of the Earth Mother, Dionysian revelers, Chaldeans, Celtic sages, and Babylonian priests. None of those groups, including Egyptian priests and Jewish rabbis, ever claimed to have invented the Tarot. Tarotists are undeterred and fabricate Tarot theories that defy the historical record. They exceed the interests and expertise of intellectuals in the Renaissance. The inflated constructions of most Tarotists are easy targets for sharp criticism from academia.²

However, the critics of Tarotism go too far. They rightly discount the exotic trappings that the Tarot accumulated in the 1800s and 1900s. But we should not reject the original nucleus of the Egyptomane theory. I say this despite my own complaints about those eighteenth-century authors. We simply need to apply scholarship that was not available to them.

In my research, I never followed any particular agenda or became the spokesman for any particular doctrine. I independently discovered clues and followed them wherever they led. In the end—after forty years of study—my theory actually uses ingredients that are popular in Tarotism, but I reorganize them with a respect for iconography.

THEORY



Earlier Egyptomania

The Tarot was not invented by Egyptians; but I am certain that its inventor was a great admirer of Egypt. Court de Gébelin and his colleagues, although participating in a phase of Egyptomania, did not consider that the Tarot could have arisen in some earlier phase(s) of Egyptomania, rather than the Egyptian empire itself. Egyptomania occurred in Renaissance Italy and, still earlier, at medieval Harran, in Asia Minor. The city was a

center for esoteric studies, including Egyptian mysticism, magic, and astrology. In my historical approach to deciphering the Tarot, I involve three main periods.

1. Astrologers in Harran, before AD 1000, invented the 4-suit deck of cards and used esoteric symbols as suit-signs.
2. Italian humanists, before 1440, supplemented the suits with Egyptianizing trumps, albeit blended with classical and Christian motifs.
3. French savants, by the 1750s, began interpreting the trumps along Egyptian lines but failed to consult the proper documents.

The Hieroglyphic Form

In ancient Egypt, hieroglyphic writing was reserved for privileged students. Without that status, even inquiring intellectuals were denied instruction. Neoplatonist philosophers imaginatively assumed that hieroglyphs were almost magical, simultaneously addressing different matters on different levels, from the ordinary to the revelatory. As late as the fourth century, a few Egyptian priests and scribes still were literate, but they jealously guarded their skill. By the time the Roman Empire fell, no one knew how to decipher hieroglyphs.

Christians had acquired the Neoplatonist impulse for finding multiple meanings in special images. Christians enthusiastically sought different strata of meaning in sacred scripture. The practice continued throughout the Middle Ages. Hugh of Saint Victor (died ca. 1140), in his reading of the Bible, specified four levels of communication: literal, moral, spiritual, mystical. These are not different genres of writing but are interactive layers of meaning in any given bit of scripture. (Literalists, please take note: your reading of the Bible neglects 75 percent of the meaning.) Christian writers began to accommodate polysemy (multi-level significance) in their own writings. In a famous letter attributed to Dante, his poetry is said to satisfy the Victorine formula. This was the scholarly

perception of symbols when hieroglyphs came under examination in the Renaissance.

Of course, Egypt was far away, its religion was obsolete, and samples of inscriptions were scarce. Renaissance artists did not decipher the script, nor did they seriously attempt to reproduce its visual style. They instead designed their own hieroglyphs with hidden messages. Renaissance intellectuals were fascinated by riddles, enigmas, and codes. Their meanings, when lacking a qualified interpreter, could elude the casual observer. That is exactly what happened to the Tarot in its earliest days. In the very period when both the archetypal Tarot and allegorical art were most familiar, viewers complained that the trumps were a senseless mishmash. This reaction is an important clue. It disqualifies certain modern theories that base the trumps' symbolism primarily on some famous literary work, be it the Apocalypse of St. John or the poetry of Petrarch. Those works of course were well known in fifteenth-century Italy and would have been recognized in the Tarot, had they really been at its foundation. If literary references are applicable here, they are necessarily obscure.

The Hieroglyphic Content

The Tarot trumps are not really vestiges of any "Book of Thoth" surviving from antiquity. They are, however, Renaissance "hieroglyphs" designed with a respect for the inventions attributed to Thoth. His reputation extended beyond Egypt. Renaissance humanists would have known Thoth through the recovery of ancient manuscripts. The term "renaissance," after all, refers to a rebirth: humanists were dedicated to the revival of age-old wisdom. In 1423, Giovanni Aurispa and Ambrogio Traversari, visiting in Constantinople, found a manuscript containing Plato's collected works and took it home to Italy.³ In his *Phaedrus*, Plato purports to quote Socrates on the identity of Thoth.⁴

I heard, then, at Naucratis, in Egypt, was one of the ancient gods of that country, the one whose sacred bird is called the ibis, and the

name of the god himself was Theuth. He it was who invented numbers and arithmetic and geometry and astronomy, also draughts [lots? checkers? some other board game?] and dice, and, most important of all, letters.

The priests of Thoth actually did credit him with all kinds of computation, notation, and language. Thoth's "letters" were understood to have been hieroglyphs.

The Tarot's form is hieroglyphic in the Neoplatonist sense (having multi-level meanings). The Tarot's layers of meaning accommodate Thoth's other innovations: numbers (for arithmology, organizing the trump order), geometry (for arranging cards when meditating on them), astronomy (for astrology as part of the trump imagery), and perhaps even games (meaning the cards themselves).

All of this occult knowledge is encompassed by a theosophy called "Hermetism." It merges Greek philosophy with Egyptian theology. The philosophy amalgamated Platonism with Pythagoreanism and Stoicism. The theology amalgamated theurgy and religion. The latter came principally from the cult of Thoth.

The founding of Hermetism was not imputed to Thoth alone. The Hermetists themselves credited a legendary sage, Hermes Trismegistus. That is a compound name that bespeaks its Greco-Egyptian heritage. Hermes was a Greek god taken to be equivalent to Thoth. "Trismegistus" means "thrice greatest," an Egyptian title presumably bestowed on Thoth. Hermes Trismegistus reputedly assimilated Thoth's wisdom (including alchemy, astrology, numerology, magic, and mysticism).

I feel certain that the Tarot designers were aware of the entire Hermetic theosophy. In my view, they used images, numbers, and symmetries to accommodate three systems—astrological, arithmological, mystagogical—each with a complete program, always enlisting all of the trumps. These are the criteria that I will use in interpreting the cards.

A SAMPLE OF ICONOGRAPHY

The Tarot mystified most Renaissance observers because of the curious combination of images and their confusing hierarchy. Individual trumps, however, were usually familiar, quite apart from the Tarot. They were standard allegories. Apparently, the deck's designers used exoteric symbols to disguise esoteric systems. This process was fashionable in Renaissance iconography. Conventional symbols were rearranged to produce new allegories that were unusual or unique.

To casual observers today, the trumps are doubly mysterious, for even the standard allegories have become exotic and require interpretation by iconographers. As I draw on their discipline, I will refer to symbolic artifacts, cultural contexts, and esoteric adaptations. Here, I can demonstrate by developing the lowest and the highest trumps: the "Juggler" as Agathodemon and the "World" as Isis.

Agathodemon was the son of Thoth and the father of Hermes Trismegistus. In this mythic realm, Agathodemon assumes an amazing range of roles, and they oddly merge. He is the Good Demon (in Greek: *Agathodaimon* or *Agathos Daimon*). He is most familiar as a personal protector. This spirit was revered among the Greeks, Egyptians, Romans, and Harranian Sabians. Socrates claimed to be able to hear a tutelary *daimon* who gave warnings that always proved accurate. With the spread of Christianity, the spirit was understood as an angel. We still echo this belief when we speak of obeying our better angels. Agathodemon receives some of the prayers preserved in ancient papyri.⁵ By some accounts, the guiding spirit helps unborn souls in choosing their qualities for a sojourn on earth. He also could protect a region, a community, an estate, a vineyard. When attached to a place, he was the same as the *genius loci*.

Agathodemon was variously visualized. When he guarded the land and promoted the harvest, he could appear as a human or a snake. Egyptian artists added a human-headed snake. On Gnostic gems, his name accompanies a lion-headed snake, apparently with magical powers. The demon sometimes was the equivalent of the soul or its highest aspect. Then he was usually represented as a boy, an old man, or a god. These human types often carried emblems of abundance: bowl, horn of plenty, sheaf of grain, bouquet of flowers. The spirit, as a personal companion, also dispensed lots (in Latin: *sortes*, which relates directly to "sortilege")

and “sorcery”). Agathodemon’s lot indicated the kind of life chosen by the prenatal soul. The physical lot was a small token, usually a short strip of wood, papyrus, or parchment.

Life’s vicissitudes are allegorized in a woodcut print by Hans Holbein the Younger (ca. 1497?–1543). He freely interprets the famous *Tablet of Cebes*, a Greek text once erroneously attributed to Cebes of Thebes, a disciple of Socrates. The real author probably lived in the first century AD. The “tablet” is described as an extensive mural or frieze. It probably never existed physically but was the author’s literary invention to support a homily. It charts the soul’s progress through the precinct of Life. Holbein shows unborn souls as naked babies. Each takes its turn consulting a bearded man labeled “Genius.” (In the text, this figure is called a *daimon* and a *daimonion*.) Holbein represents the Genius as bestowing a lot, shown as an open scroll of small size (figure 0.2). He admits souls into a landscape full of allegorical beings. They are comparable to some Tarot inhabitants: lovers, Virtues, hermits. The Genius is the only figure here who carries a wand and wears a broad-brimmed hat. He thus resembles the Juggler.

Among modern Tarotists, the curving brim of the Juggler’s hat is commonly believed to embody the infinity sign (∞), called a “lemniscate” (a *lemniscus* is a draped ribbon). Sadly for the Juggler, the lemniscate did not exist in the 1400s. It was introduced in *Arithmetica Infinitorum* (Oxford, 1655) by the English mathematician John Wallis (1616–1703).

Nevertheless, the Juggler’s hat is significant. In medieval and Renaissance art, broad-brimmed hats are artificial signs marking exotic dignitaries, such as biblical prophets, ancient magi, Christian apostles, Arthurian knights, Trojan heroes.⁶ The Juggler’s hat likewise identifies him as a native of a remote region, which, in this context, I take to be the abode of souls before birth. I would judge that the Juggler, as the first trump, stands in the same position as Holbein’s Genius, at the beginning of a soul’s journey through mortal life.

In the *Tarot de Marseille*, the Juggler’s outstretched hands usually hold a wand and a circular object. The implements impress me as divinatory lots. At the ancient temple of Fortune at Antium, priests scattered small sticks and balls on an altar. The resulting patterns were interpreted to

reveal the future. The Juggler, as Agathodemon, presumably casts lots and informs the soul of its mission in life.

Holbein's print also includes a winged goddess hovering on a sphere. She is the ancient Fortuna, represented on a sphere to symbolize her instability. The poet Horace made Fortuna the ruler of the seas, inconstant and unpredictable.⁷ Her attributes can be nautical, such as a rudder or a sail. In the Renaissance, her perch often became a world globe, symbolic of her power over the whole universe.



Figure 0.2. Good Demon or Genius dispensing lots, woodcut by Hans Holbein the Younger.
(Title page for *Tabula Cebetis*, Basel, ca. 1525.)



Figure 0.3. Author's drawing of the World trump, handcrafted, Italian, ca.1480. (Original: Estampes Kh 24 rés, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.)

Fortuna's different attributes occur in different World trumps. In a fifteenth-century Tarot in the Bibliothèque Nationale, the lady wears a halo, indicating that Fortuna is a divine power ([figure 0.3](#)). An archivist at the Bibliothèque long ago labeled this card as "Fortune." In the *Minchiate* (Florentine Tarot), Fortuna stands on the terrestrial globe and wears the wings visible in Holbein's print and many others. We find both the world globe and the sail in an Italian style of Tarot that traveled northward. It

was familiar in France and Belgium (figure 0.4). In certain Italian versions of the *Tarot de Marseille*, as in nineteenth-century Turin and Novara, the woman has been given a globe at her feet. Card-makers must have recognized that the lady's pose was that of the balancing Fortuna, and they restored the identifying sphere. They may have erred, however, for this globe is absent from the oldest versions of the *Tarot de Marseille*.⁸

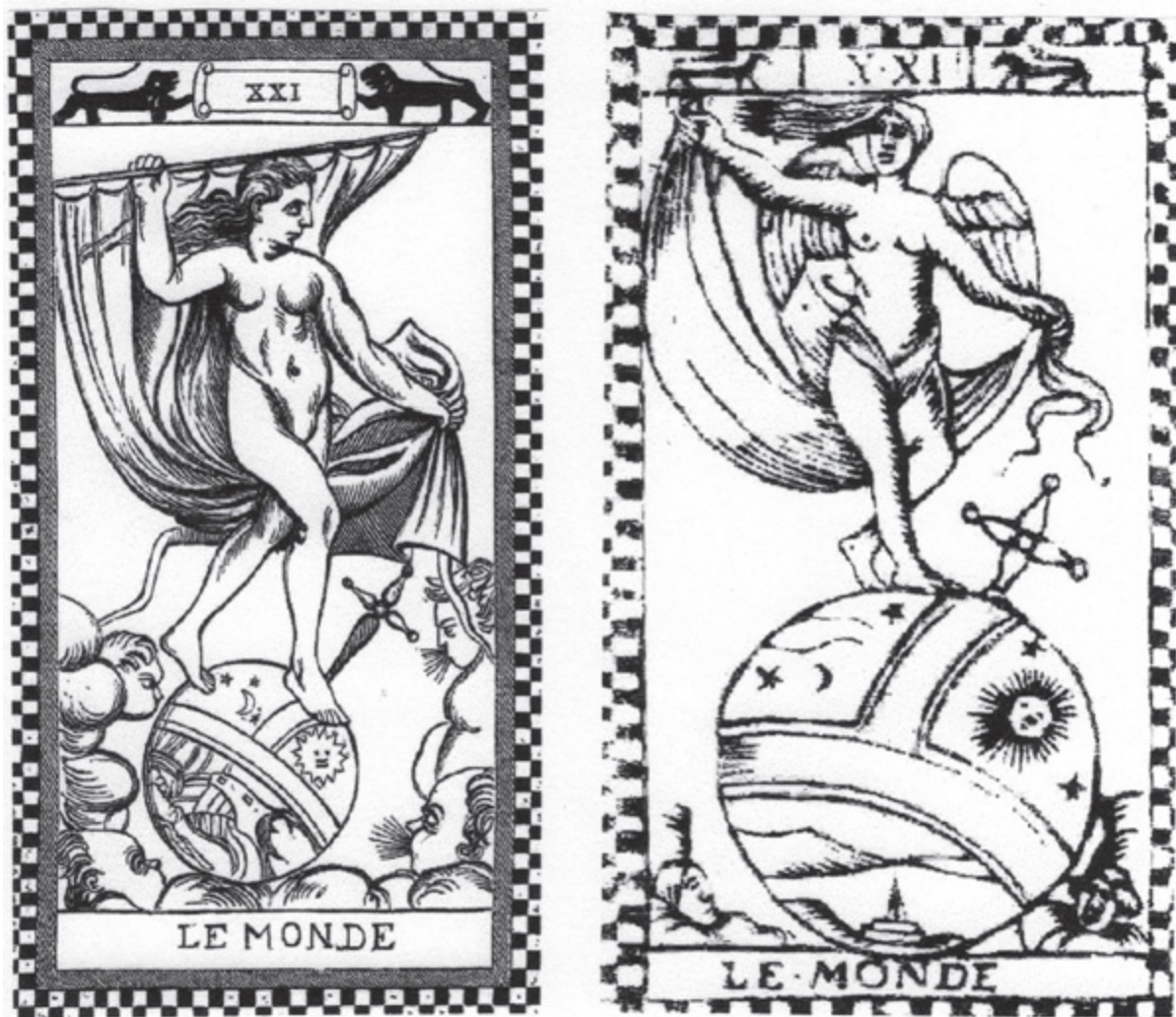


Figure 0.4. Left: World trump, woodcut and stencil, anonymous, Paris, ca. 1600. (Drawing from Taylor, 1865; see bibliography [original: Estampes Kh 34 rés, Tome 1, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris].) Right: World trump, woodcut, by Adam C. de Hautot, Rouen, ca. 1735. (Private collection.)

The absence of the globe could indicate that the *Marseille* Fortuna is *not* capricious. She would be Good Fortune (*Agatha Tyche*), an appropriate

companion for the Juggler as the Good Demon. During Egypt's Ptolemaic period, *Agatha Tyche* and *Agathos Daimon* shared temples. Our talents and personality traits, shaped by our demon, lead us to our accomplishments and circumstances, shaped by our fortune. "Character is destiny," said Heraclitus.

Good Fortune has another Egyptian connection. Plato's passage about Thoth would have prompted the Tarot's designers to consult Plato's followers. Egyptian records were of course unavailable, but relevant Roman authors were accessible in the Renaissance. One of these was an aspiring Platonist named Apuleius (fl. AD 150). In his novel, the *Metamorphosis* or *The Golden Ass*, the hero suffers a magical mishap and is physically transformed into a donkey. After many misadventures, he is alerted to a procession in honor of the goddess Isis. He eats the consecrated roses, and they restore him to human form. He receives an invitation from one of the officiating priests, who, with incredible aplomb, seems scarcely to react to the miracle that has just occurred. He sympathizes with the hero, so randomly maltreated by Fortune.⁹

What advantage has iniquitous Fortune derived from robbers, from wild beasts, from servitude, from the various circuits of the roughest paths, and from the fear of death to which you were daily exposed? You are now, therefore, received into the protection of Fortune [not that other Fortune, blind and iniquitous], but the Fortune who can see and who also illuminates the other Gods with the splendour of her light.... Attend the pomp of your saviour Goddess [Isis/Fortuna] with triumphant steps.

A Renaissance Hermetist might well have envisioned this goddess as looking like the woman in the World card. She can be Fortuna and Isis, too. Apuleius causes his hero to follow Isis with *triumphant* steps. I note that the word "trumps" derives from the Latin *triumphi*. That was the original name for Tarot cards. Were they so called merely because they resembled the allegorical parades, also termed "triumphs," in Renaissance Italy? Or did someone interpret the allegorical cards as culminating in the triumph of Isis?

I will again cite Apuleius, as well as other Roman authors: notably Manilius, Nicomachus of Gerasa, Lactantius, Macrobius, and Martianus Capella. They were not from Egypt, but some were enchanted by Egyptian lore. Most were Platonists. All were highly regarded by Renaissance intellectuals. The trump cards unexpectedly illustrate rare ideas from rare manuscripts and therefore are difficult to identify at a glance. This partially explains why the trumps have avoided easy analysis.

In deciphering the cards, I have confronted the enigmas as they have come down to us. I have resisted the temptation to “correct” them to meet my inclinations. A few details, however, really have become distorted by careless copying, and they need to be rectified. I can give a succinct example that is relevant here. The Good Demon is sometimes given an evil counterpart, the Bad Demon (*Cacodaimon*), supposed to participate in the soul’s judgment and punishment in the afterlife. This demon surely can be found in the Devil trump. The Tarot’s creator was probably a Christian despite an interest in pre-Christian symbolism. He or she employed the Christian version of Satan in order to embody the Bad Demon. In the *Tarot de Marseille*, inexpert copyists have obscured the attribute held by the Devil, as I reconstruct the card. It did not include a torch, as many Tarotists have supposed. The implement was meant to be some kind of hook. In the *Tarot de Marseille*, the hooks are nearly lost among the curves of the bat wings. The line work can be further obscured by the coloring of the wings or by the coloring of the hooks as though they were flames. We can correct this misinterpretation by a quick consultation of other Renaissance art. Hooks and blades appear commonly as tools with which devils ensnare sinful souls and drag them off to Hell ([figure 0.5](#)).



Figure 0.5. Devils with hooks, woodcut. (Plate by Giovanni Andrea Vavassore, *Opera*, Venice, 1510.)

Other Christian concepts and clichés are prominent in the trumps. I conclude that their creators were Christian Platonists (possibly Hermetists) with an interest in Egyptian Platonism (essentially Hermetism).

WHAT ABOUT THE CABALA?

The cabala is the dominant form of Jewish mysticism, formulated in the Middle Ages but having a very ancient ancestry. Cabalism and Hermetism

have mutual ancestors: Pythagoreanism (with its doctrine of a metaphysical realm of numbers) and Neoplatonism (with its doctrine of a hierarchical realm of spirits).

All the same, no Christian Hermetist in the early Renaissance is likely to have studied the cabala. Cabalistic literature was abstruse in its subject matter, written in a demanding language, in scarce manuscripts, scrutinized in secret, and jealously guarded by Jewish cliques. If a Christian Hermetist succeeded in overcoming those obstacles, why do we not have the name of such an independent and intelligent person? Why would he inject cabalism (received from Jews) into playing cards (received from Muslims)? I think we are on the wrong track.

Still, I try to be accommodating. Conceivably, the first Tarotists could have known a few features of Jewish mysticism without having studied it deeply. For instance, humanist scholars knew that the Jews had invested spiritual significance in the Hebrew alphabet, containing 22 letters. Records suggest that the first Tarot (ca. 1440) had only 14 trumps. By about 1465, the deck had expanded to the 22 standard allegories. Possibly the total was contrived to accommodate the number held sacred by the Jews. No deeper cabalism necessarily informed individual trumps.

Only in 1486 did Pico della Mirandola begin to legitimize cabalistic studies among Christians. He makes no mention of Tarot cards. By the early 1500s, Christian esoterists certainly were blending Hermetism and cabalism. A famous example is Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia* (Cologne, 1533). He makes no mention of Tarot cards.

An overlay of informed cabalism is not apparent in the Tarot before the 1700s. Testimony comes from those French esoterists who regarded the Tarot as the "Book of Thoth." They saw no incongruity in a combination of Egyptian and Jewish mysteries. In popular parlance, the terms Hermetism and cabalism had become interchangeable, synonymous with "occult philosophy" or simply "magic." (I have said that de Mellet and Etteilla extolled the Tarot as the "Book of Thoth." I can add that de Gébelin and Etteilla referred specifically to Hermetism. All three authors hinted at the Tarot's cabalism.) As I remarked, Etteilla incorporated cabalism in his cartomancy—or so I hypothesize. It underlies today's interpretations of the numeral cards.

The distinction between Hermetism and cabalism is rarely stated by Tarotists. When they do discuss these subjects, the trumps are freighted with cabalistic meanings, and the suits are freighted with Hermetic meanings. Originally, the deck was Hermetic throughout; the numeral cards apparently became cabalistic only in the 1700s. That cabalism nevertheless has a venerable heritage and is worth our study. Hermetism and cabalism are the esoteric traditions referenced in the title of this book.

We will glide through a tremendous sweep of history. A time line could prove useful.

TIME LINE

Ancient Period

3000 BC or earlier	Thoth begins as a moon god in the Egyptian pantheon.
ca. 530 BC	Pythagoras expounds on metaphysics, including numbers as transcendental realities.
ca. 350 BC	Plato combines his theory of ideal forms with the teachings of Pythagoras.
after 330 BC	In Hellenistic Egypt, Thoth merges with the Greek Hermes.
ca. 100 BC	Teachings attributed to Thoth-Hermes begin to develop into Hermetism.
ca. AD 10	Emperor Augustus embraces astrology.
ca. AD 200	Christian literature mentions Hermetism (sometimes tolerated, sometimes rejected).
ca. AD 250	Plotinus, a Platonist from Roman Egypt, stresses mysticism and produces Neoplatonism.
AD 312	Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity.

Medieval Period

800s	The Chinese invent domino cards.
ca. 1000	Asians develop card decks having four suits.
ca. 1000	Rabbis in Provence combine ancient Jewish mysticism with Neoplatonism.
ca. 1050	Byzantines edit Hermetism (disseminated by refugees from Harran?).
1150– 1200	The <i>Bahir</i> combines earlier texts to become the first important book of the cabala.
ca. 1235	Issac the Blind, a leading cabalist, dies in Narbonne. His disciples form schools in Spain.
1256	The <i>Picatrix</i> , a magician's manual written in Arabic (ca. 1100?), is translated into Spanish.
ca. 1350	Asian suit cards, via Mameluke intermediaries, arrive in Europe.

Renaissance Period, etc.

ca. 1400	Italian humanists find ancient manuscripts and hasten the Renaissance.
1430s	Italians invent the Tarot, adding trumps to the old suits.
1486	Giovanni Pico, count of Mirandola, extols the cabala as reinforcing Christian esoterism.
1500s– 1700s	The game of Tarot (nonesoteric) pervades western Europe (Britain and Iberia excepted).
1720s?	French esoterists view the Tarot as both Hermetic and cabalistic.

- 1789** French Revolutionaries storm the Bastille, the state prison in Paris.
- 1791** The magus Etteilla, having codified modern cartomancy and having designed the first specifically cartomantic Tarot, dies in Paris. His books disseminate his teachings.

Part One



Theory: Hermetism and the Standard Tarot

Thoth, Hermes, and Hieroglyphs



WHO WAS THOTH?

“Thoth” is a Greek adaptation of the original Egyptian name, probably *Tehuti* or *Djehuti*. Thoth was one of the most popular and influential deities in the Egyptian pantheon. Egyptian art represents him as an ibis, an ibis-headed man, a baboon, a baboon-headed man. Thoth seems to have begun as a god of the moon, whose cycle charts the month. Thoth’s name was given to the first month of the ancient Egyptian calendar.

Thoth’s avatars presumably express his varied qualities and associations. The beak of the ibis resembles the crescent moon. The bird’s measured pace respects Thoth’s predilection for precision. For the same reason, the baboon was said to urinate precisely every two hours during the equinox. The baboon was also noted for its intelligence.

Thoth’s intellect and exactitude equip him to serve as a secretary to other gods. In the Judgment Hall of Osiris, where the soul is weighed to determine its status in the afterlife, Thoth records the results. Thoth, we know, is supposed to have invented writing. Hymns, prayers, magical spells, and medical prescriptions could be considered gifts from Thoth. His patronage was sought for the keeping of the temple records, the calendar, the holy days, and their appropriate rituals. Thoth supplied the plans for temples and sacred precincts; more fundamentally, he was the teacher of pure geometry. This blends with general mathematics, which leads back to calculation, notation, and record keeping. Thoth as secretary

is shown holding a reed stylus and a writing kit ([figure 1.1](#)). As a measurer, he carries a calibrated stick, a long cane of palm wood, notched at regular intervals ([figure 1.2](#)).



Figure 1.1. Thoth as scribe. (From Cory, 1840; see bibliography.)



Figure 1.2. Thoth's calibrated staff. (From Cory, 1840; see bibliography.)

As a moon god, Thoth is assistant to the sun god, Ra. The moon reflects the sun's light, and Thoth transmits Ra's pronouncements. The mystique of the moon's light doubtless contributes to Thoth's reputation for bestowing enlightenment in the Egyptian mysteries. Note that they involve Thoth's legacies: sacred language, magic, secret knowledge, and visions of heavenly light.

Thoth's consort is Ma'at, the personification of cosmic order. All of Thoth's talents serve to maintain that order.

THOTH IN HELLENIZED EGYPT

In the seventh century BC, Egypt was besieged by the Nubians from the south and the Assyrians from the north. The Assyrians installed a new dynasty, the twenty-sixth, with Pharaoh Psamtik as their vassal. He promptly consolidated his power and reestablished Egypt's independence. He allowed Greeks to settle in the Nile Delta. By the end of the dynasty, Amasis II had founded the city of Naucratis, and Greek merchants flourished there. The Twenty-sixth Dynasty, with the help of Greek mercenaries, attempted to reestablish dominance in Asia. They were easily defeated by the Babylonians. A Babylonian occupation of Egypt was then obviated by the Persian invasion of the whole region. The succession of pharaohs continued but with only nominal power and unresolved conflict with the Persian overlords.

The young Plato (ca. 430–ca. 347 BC) is supposed to have studied in Egypt. According to Clement of Alexandria, Plato was the pupil of Sechnuphis of On.¹ Plutarch names Chonuphis as one of Plato's Egyptian tutors.²

Alexander the Great led his troops across the Middle East and conquered Persia. He entered Egypt in 332 BC and was welcomed as a liberator. He encouraged the spread of Greek culture. This effort continued under his Greek successors, the Ptolemies. They systematically conflated the gods of Greece and Egypt. Thoth was identified with Hermes, the Olympian god of learning, communication, and eloquence. Both Thoth and Hermes were guides of souls after death and were patrons of magic. Hermes's own abilities are those still attributed to magicians. His wand of office probably originated as a magic wand. He could impart divine truth and practical know-how; he could communicate with both gods and humans; he could levitate, heal, and prophesy. By the close of the Ptolemaic period, Thoth and Hermes had become embodiments of Wisdom. Devotees could comfortably speak of Thoth-Hermes and could accord him the highest reverence. Thoth-Hermes, in his most abstract and exalted form, became the Word (*Logos*) that commanded the creation and continuation of our universe.

Bolus of Mendes (ca. 200 BC), using the pseudonym of Democritus, wrote about alchemy. Alchemical texts subsequently began to appear

under the names of Egyptian deities, such as Isis, Agathodemon, and Hermes. Alchemy eventually became known as the “Hermetic art.”

The influence of Bolus of Mendes has been detected in the *Kyranides*, a compilation of magical and medical lore descending from different dates. Six treatises survive. One of them purports to be written by a certain Harpocraton of Alexandria, who must have flourished ca. 150 AD.³ The *Kyranides* ascribes four of its treatises to Hermes.

The title Trismegistus (thrice greatest) presumably derived from the Egyptian practice of addressing the gods as “great,” “twice great,” etc. Hermes Trismegistus could still be considered a god, but, if so, he was supposed to have begun as a man, one who attained enlightenment and ascended as a divinity. More often, he was regarded as a sage, presumed to have lived in remote antiquity and to have inherited the wisdom of Thoth. Some authors tried to simplify the Hermetic traditions by creating a genealogy: Thoth was the father of Agathodemon, who was the father of Hermes Trismegistus, who was the father of Tat. “Tat” is a variation of “Tot,” a variation of Thoth.

The Hermetica deliberately integrated Egyptian religion and magic with Greek mythology and philosophy, especially that which is now called Middle Platonism. These Greco-Egyptian texts, written in Greek, used the terminology of the Middle Platonists but rarely cited Plato or his followers.

Hermetic literature persisted throughout the pagan period of the Roman Empire. The Romans had identified Hermes with their Mercurius (Mercury). Therefore, in the Latin texts, the name Hermes Trismegistus became Mercurius Termaximus or Mercurius Triplex. However, the Hermetica were influential only within their own circle, in northern Africa. In the third century, Middle Platonism modulated into Neoplatonism. From its beginning, the Neoplatonists respected mystical experience and knowledge, and yet they ignored Hermetism. They may have scrupulously avoided the subject as being too similar to Gnosticism (regarded as Judaeo-Christian magic), which they disdained. However, the famous Neoplatonist Iamblichus (fl. 325) was keenly interested in magic and religious rites. He delved into the Egyptian mysteries and thus made Hermetism a legitimate study among his followers.

The *Corpus Hermeticum* is a collection of more than a dozen treatises. They purport to have been translated from Egyptian but in fact originated in Greek. They probably date variously from the first to the third centuries. The treatises differ about doctrine, but they all show the usual melding of pharaonic religion and Greek philosophy. The unifying theme is the salvation of the human soul. Its place in the spiritual and physical universe is closely examined.

The *Corpus Hermeticum* was brought from Macedonia to Italy in the 1460s. That was too late for the *Corpus* to have guided the first Tarotists. I do not doubt the importance of Hermetism in the Tarot trumps, but the connection must have occurred through other channels. I suggest that Latin intermediaries were sufficient to prompt the imagery and the order of the trumps. I will now survey the ancient Latin references to Thoth and Hermes Trismegistus:

THOTH AMONG THE ROMAN ELITE



Cicero

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC) belonged to a clique of philosophers in Rome who considered themselves to be the direct heirs of Plato's Academy in Athens. In *De Natura Deorum* (*On the Nature of the Gods*), Cicero constructs a literary fiction that features real philosophers from his youth. They supposedly convene for a holiday banquet at the home of Gaius Aurelius Cotta, a prominent citizen who, in 82 BC, had been named to the Roman priesthood. Cicero causes Cotta to recite detailed information about the identities of the gods of Greece, Rome, and Egypt. These particulars probably did not really come from Cotta. Cicero is thought to have consulted Marcus Terentius Varro's masterwork, *Antiquitates Rerum Humanarum et Divinarum* (*Annals of Things Human and Divine*), unfortunately lost to us. Varro was Cicero's friend and fellow

Academician. We learn that the name Mercury applies to five different gods.⁴

Our Mercury has the Sky for father and the Day for mother; he is represented in a state of sexual excitation traditionally said to be due to passion inspired by the sight of Proserpina. Another is the son of Valens and Phoronis; this is the subterranean Mercury identified with Trophonius. The third, the son of Jove and Maia, the legends make the father of Pan by Penelope. The fourth has Nile for father; the Egyptians deem it sinful to pronounce his name. The fifth, worshipped by the people of Pheneus, is said to have killed Argus and consequently to have fled in exile to Egypt, where he gave the Egyptians their laws and letters. His Egyptian name is Theuth which is also the name in the Egyptian calendar for the first month of their year.

G. R. S. Mead notes that the old manuscripts of *De Natura Deorum* contain at least thirteen variations on the spelling of Thoth: Then, Ten, Their, Thoyt, Theyt, Theyn, Thetum, Thern, Thernum, Theutatem, Theut, Thoyth, Theuth.⁵

Marcus Manilius

Manilius wrote during the first century. He is known to us only through his *Astronomica*, a lengthy poem in Latin. Early in the text, Manilius refers to the Cyllenian god, a poetic term for Hermes, supposedly born at Cyllene (Kyllini), a mountain in Corinthia, Greece. Manilius praises this god for having perceived the principles of astrology and having inspired humans to study it. This role for Hermes was a late development. We are accustomed to the blurring of identities that allowed Thoth to assimilate qualities of Hermes, but here the process apparently reversed. In the *Astronomica*, we have an interesting case in which the Greek Hermes is honored for the astrology that earlier belonged to the Egyptian Thoth.

Apuleius

Lucius Apuleius (born ca. AD 125) belonged to a prominent family in Madaura, in North Africa. He studied at Athens, Rome, and Carthage. He is best known today for his *Metamorphosis* or *The Golden Ass*. Apuleius's hero becomes a devotee of Isis and, later, a priest of Osiris. In these religious episodes, Apuleius almost certainly drew on his personal knowledge.

We know that Apuleius, probably during his midthirties, embarked on a journey to Egypt, but we do not know whether he arrived there. The trip was interrupted by events that are central to his *Apologia* (*Defense*). In the town of Oea (modern Tripoli, Libya), Apuleius visited a colleague and stayed to marry the young man's mother. The friend unexpectedly died. His relatives charged Apuleius with using magic to commit seduction and murder, both contrived to inherit the family's money. He successfully defended himself, but his *Apologia* candidly demonstrates actual knowledge of the supernatural. His enemies had observed his solicitous care of wrapped objects that he kept among the household idols. Apuleius explained his secret relics as mementos of religious mysteries into which he had been initiated. From our modern perspective, we would see little distinction between magic talismans and cultic talismans. Apuleius was also criticized for his use of a carved image, either a figurine or a seal, depicting a skeleton. He replied that it was nothing more sinister than an image of Mercury. But Apuleius himself identified Mercury as the patron of divination. And Apuleius relied on Varro for an account of divination: a young medium gazed fixedly at a bowl of water that reflected a statue of Mercury.

Apuleius also wrote an essay, "On the Demon of Socrates," showing a keen interest in spirits. He classifies different kinds of demons, some evil but some virtuous and helpful to humans. Mystical Platonists revered good demons as intermediaries between humans and gods.

Apuleius venerated Hermes and also Asclepius, the god whose name is attached to a Hermetic dialog. Until the modern age, Apuleius was credited with translating the dialog from Greek to Latin. (The Internet

supplies an argument that still upholds Apuleius as the translator of the *Asclepius*, but this view now has scant support.)

Tertullian

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (ca. 160–ca. 230), born in Carthage, was the son of a centurion and was well educated. He specialized in rhetoric and law. In about 197, Tertullian converted to Christianity and became a prolific writer on its behalf. He ultimately followed the ecstatic practices of the Montanists. (The Catholic Church, already worried about the sect, condemned the Montanists when they began to form their own hierarchy.) In his *De Anima* (*On the Soul*), Tertullian assumes that Hermes Trismegistus existed in remote antiquity and that his teachings informed Plato. One of their doctrines was metempsychosis (reincarnation), a teaching that Tertullian says was sometimes attributed to Pythagoras but sometimes to “the Egyptian Hermes.” The same Hermes taught that the soul retains its individuality after its death, so as to “render unto the Father an account of those things that it did while in the body.” Tertullian cites this passage as a Hermetic quotation, but the precise words are not found in the surviving literature. Something similar appeared (later?) in the Latin *Asclepius*.⁶

Cyprian

Thascus Caecilius Cyprianus (ca. 200–258) belonged to a reputable pagan family in North Africa. He studied under Tertullian and became a teacher of rhetoric. Cyprian adopted Christianity ca. 246 and, about two years later, became bishop of Carthage. He was soon martyred. He briefly mentions Hermes: “Thrice Greatest Hermes speaks of the One God and declares Him beyond all comprehension and evaluation.”⁷

The Latin *Asclepius*

The original manuscript of the *Asclepius* would have been in Greek and probably dated from the late 200s. The version known to us is in Latin and dates from before 400. Unlike the other Latin texts cited in this chapter, the *Asclepius* goes far beyond brief references to Hermes: it purports to give us his discourse with disciples named Asclepius, Tat, and Hammon. Hermes's presentation is diffuse and disorganized, but several points are clear. In general, it treats the relations among humanity, the gods, and the cosmos (described as a living being). Humans have the ability and the duty to understand and modify the universe. Humans are superior to the gods, for we will experience both mortality and immortality. Hermes begins to explain the hierarchy of the gods, but a break in the text deprives us of the comprehensive design. Hermes gives a graphic account of how we will be evaluated after death. I would say succinctly that a good life will have been dedicated to creativity. Three types of creativity are presented as sacred: biological, intellectual, and magical. The magical process entails the specialized knowledge of the ancient priests. They knew how to exemplify the gods in images that would respond to human commands. This passage has been cited frequently by historians of magic. Also famous is Hermes's prophecy of Egypt's decline and fall. Some modern commentators have tried to attach these predictions to historical events that could help date the *Asclepius*. We now know that generations of Egyptians produced a genre of apocalyptic literature without reference to current events.

A closing prayer also occurs independently, with slight differences, in one of the Greek Magical Papyri⁸ and in one of the Coptic manuscripts found near the Egyptian village of Nag Hammadi.⁹ Nag Hammadi Codex VI, 8, has part of the *Asclepius* (sections 21–29) in Coptic.¹⁰ These codices were buried ca. AD 400 and were found in 1945. They are Gnostic in character and seem to constitute a library, possibly hidden to avoid a charge of heresy.

Lactantius

Lucius Caelius Firmianus Lactantius (ca. 260–340), a North African, was deeply interested in Christian theology. He is said to have received instruction from Arnobius (fl. 305), a Christian philosopher. Arnobius, in his *Adversus Nationes* (*Against the Pagans*), complains about the ridicule that Christians have endured from the schools of Hermes, of Plato, and of Pythagoras. Lactantius, however, was more conciliatory.

Lactantius, in his *Divinae Institutiones* (*Divine Institutes*), draws on Hermetism, not in order to provide a complete explication of it, but to show that certain pagans had anticipated the essence of Christianity in their own revelations. When first mentioning Hermes Trismegistus, Lactantius refers to Cicero's classification of Thoth as the fifth Mercury, the god who instructed the Egyptians in laws and letters. This god was really a man but was worshiped because of his profound knowledge of many arts and sciences. He was consequently honored as very great, "thrice greatest." Lactantius's discussion then relies on a few of the treatises known from the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Lactantius more extensively quotes from an early version of the Latin *Asclepius* and from the Greek original, which he calls *Perfect Sermon*. This is the title cited by Johannes Lydus in the sixth century.

In many respects, Lactantius was justified in finding similarities between the Bible and the Hermetica. Both authorities vouch for the One God, the creator and benefactor of the universe. He is called Father (*Pater*) and Lord (*Dominus*). He is ineffable and indeed beyond complete comprehension by humans. God created humans in his own image. The human form is astonishingly efficient and beautiful. Yet the physical body is inferior to the soul, which is immortal. The physical body, with its sensations, passions, and appetites, invites us to commit sin. We can resist this through the cultivation of piety. Devoted worshipers may be granted a glimpse of God. The Hermetists, like the Christians, foresee a society that will be dominated by sin and will be obliterated by God. Both Christians and Hermetists predict a final age in which the purified universe will be ruled by the righteous.

In Lactantius's era, Christianity was not yet doctrinaire. He could be creative in hunting for similarities between his beliefs and those of pagans. In some cases, we must grant that Lactantius forces the issue. He notes that the Hermetists believe in a "Son of God" and a *Logos* (meaning

“mystical Word,” “Formulation”). Lactantius is clearly prompting us to equate those terms with Jesus Christ, who is termed *Logos* and “Son of God” in the New Testament. In reality, the Hermetic *Logos*, as Lactantius found it, would have designated a secret teaching (sermon) or Hermes as a divine emanation (God’s Word). The “Son,” as the offspring of God, would be the entire cosmos, according to the pagan Hermetists. Very few of them looked to any savior of humanity. The founders of Hermetism were content with their belief in guidance by a personal spirit.

Julius Firmicus Maternus

Julius Firmicus Maternus was a Sicilian of the fourth century. In the 330s, he wrote the astrological *Mathesis*, in which he identifies himself with the Neoplatonists. He soon converted to Christianity. In the 340s, he wrote the polemical *De Errore Profanarum Religionum* (*On the Error of the Pagan Religions*). The *Mathesis* twice indicates that its doctrine originated with the god Mercury and descended through Aesculapius, Hanubius, Nechepso, and Petosiris.¹¹ Aesculapius and Hanubius (Anubis? Hermanubis?) were supposed to have been disciples of Hermes Trismegistus. Like him, they attained nearly divine status through their initiation. Nechepso was a legendary pharaoh, while Petosiris was the pharaoh’s high priest. Those partners were credited with a textbook, one that actually existed, dealing with Hermetic magic and astrology. A historical Petosiris (fl. 300s BC) was high priest of Thoth at Khemenu (*Hmnw*, in ancient Egyptian, meaning “City of the Eight,” referring to eight creator gods whose mythology was associated with that of Thoth). The city was known in Greek as Hermopolis (“City of Hermes”). Firmicus was acquainted with astrological Hermetica, as can be inferred from his references to a tutelary Mercury and an associated Aesculapius, who is simply the Roman god equivalent to the Greek Asclepius. We cannot assume that Firmicus knew the treatise named *Asclepius*. But Firmicus knew the *Myriogenesis*, a work (now lost) that he credits to Aesculapius. Aesculapius supposedly derived his teachings from Mercury.¹² Firmicus says that the *Myriogenesis* explained how to construct a horoscope based

on the influence of each degree of the ecliptic. Asclepius/Aesculapius was a god of healing; the *Myriogenesis* would have emphasized the medical use of astrology.

Ammianus

Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330–ca. 395) was a Greek who wrote in Latin about the history of the Roman Empire. His travels included Egypt. He gives a plausible explanation of the purpose and structure of hieroglyphs.¹³ He sensibly says that the Egyptians wished to leave permanent records of the pharaohs' projects. Unlike our easy use of letters, says Ammianus, the hieroglyphs have characters for nouns, verbs, and whole concepts. In another passage, Ammianus writes about hieroglyphs in a striking context.¹⁴

There are also subterranean fissures and winding passages called syringes, which, it is said, those acquainted with the ancient rites, since they had fore-knowledge that a deluge was coming, and feared that the memory of the ceremonies might be destroyed, dug in the earth in many places with great labor; and on the walls of these caverns they carved many kinds of birds and beasts, and those countless forms of animals they called hieroglyphic writing.

The above quotation seems a probable inspiration for two Romantic myths of the 1700s and 1800s: (1) The Egyptian priests foresaw an environmental calamity and sought to preserve their doctrine, not as wall paintings but as playing cards. (2) The Egyptians supposedly painted the prototypes of the Tarot trumps on the walls of subterranean sanctums. (Neither myth is historically true.)

Ammianus is also of interest here for his reference to a tutelary spirit. He quotes the poet Menander (fl. 300 BC): “A *daimon* is assigned to every man at birth to be the mystagogue of his life.” Ammianus reminds us that Homer regarded famous men not as the direct beneficiaries of a god, but of an intermediary spirit (*daimon* or *genius*).¹⁵ Ammianus gives the

examples of Pythagoras, Socrates, Numa Pompilius, Scipio Africanus, Marius, Octavian, Hermes Termaximus, Apollonius of Tyana, and Plotinus.

While Thoth-Hermes had been humanized to become Hermes Trismegistus, the god also had been elevated to become the Divine Mind. Ammianus reports that his hero Julian, while Caesar in Gaul, secretly prayed to Mercury (when the imperial family was supposed to be Christian). The pagan theologians held this Mercury to be “the swift intelligence of the universe, arousing the activity of men’s minds.”¹⁶

Augustine

St. Augustine was Bishop of Hippo, which takes us back to Africa. Although Lactantius had willingly enlisted the Hermetic literature where it might reinforce Christianity, this tolerance had eroded when Augustine wrote his *De Civitate Dei* (*City of God*), after 412. Lactantius examined the philosophy of Hermetism, but Augustine was alert also to its practical magic. He rejected Hermes and Hermetic sorcery. The *Asclepius* maintains that the ancient Egyptians knew how to create images of the gods and derive supernatural powers from them. Augustine regarded these images as merely human constructions; the magician sadly places himself under the influence of his own poor imagination. The *Asclepius* contains the well-known prophecy about the eventual demise of Egyptian culture and religion. Augustine was delighted to cite this prediction and to anticipate its fulfillment through the success of his own religion, the Christianity that was spreading throughout the empire and beyond. Nevertheless, Augustine’s condemnation of Hermetism would seem to imply that it enjoyed some popularity, at least in North Africa or parts of it. Why else would he have constructed a refutation? We remember that Apuleius originated in this region. He had preserved the Platonist idea that demons are potentially helpful intermediaries between the worshiper and God. Augustine insisted that all demons are evil. He presented Apuleius as an inveterate magician, abhorrent to Augustine.

Martianus Minneus Felix Capella

Thoth appears surreptitiously in an influential book by Martianus Minneus Felix Capella (fl. 420), a pagan littérateur in Roman Carthage. (Nearby Madaura was his birthplace, according to the historian Cassiodorus, writing in the sixth century.) Martianus wrote *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (*The Wedding of Philology and Mercury*). Martianus clearly understood the synthesis of Mercury and Thoth. Martianus poses a numerological puzzle, saying that Mercury's sacred number can be derived from the letters of a secret name:

- The first and last letters are the “terminus of number.”
- The second letter is the number elevated in all the temples because of its *cubic* solidity.
- The third letter is that which the Samian sage regarded as symbolic of the dual ambiguity of mortal destiny.

The puzzle was solved by Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), the Dutch prodigy who published a translation of *De Nuptiis* when he was sixteen. In deciphering the secret name, we must use the Greek alphabet, in which the characters are both letters and numbers. The “terminus of number” is Nine, which terminates the sequence of single digits, 1 to 9. In Greek, the number Nine is rendered as *Theta*, the character having the phonetic value of *th*. The mystery word therefore begins and ends with *th*. The second letter is Eight or one of its multiples, since Eight is the most simple *cube* ($2 \times 2 \times 2$). I suppose that Eight was revered in the Egyptian temples because the Ogdoad, a group of eight powers, created the world. This Ogdoad became associated with Thoth. In our riddle, the number Eight is elevated by multiplying it a hundredfold. The Greek letter that represents 800 is *Omega*, O. The remaining letter is Y, the number that the Samian philosopher (Pythagoras) is supposed to have used as a symbol of the forked road, where the progress of life veers toward good or evil. The assembled letters spell THOYTH, that is, Thoth. When their numerical values are added together, the result is 1218. Martianus reduces this

number by adding the digits: $1 + 2 + 1 + 8 = 12$, and $1 + 2 = 3$. Three is Mercury's number because it symbolizes the soul (Mercury/Thoth is the guide of souls). The answer to the riddle is child's play...but only when the child is Hugo Grotius!

We note that Martianus's riddle associates Thoth with numerology, Egyptian cosmology, and a Pythagorean allegory on virtue.

Later in Martianus's text we encounter the zodiacal sign of Virgo (a sign that astrologers place under the rulership of Mercury). Martianus presents her as a living being, carrying stalks of wheat in one hand and, in the other, an ebony tablet engraved with mystic symbols. Its devices are sacred to Thoth-Hermes. It depicts an ibis equipped as Mercury, having a petasus (a traveler's helmet; that of Hermes usually has two wings) and a caduceus (a herald's wand; that of Hermes usually has two snakes). The beak of Martianus's ibis is inscribed with the name of a "Memphitic month." This refers to the month of Thoth in the calendar at the ancient Egyptian city of Memphis. Subordinate motifs on Virgo's tablet are meant to be hieroglyphs. They are the "letters" that Thoth is supposed to have invented.

EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHS

Authentic Egyptian hieroglyphs can be sorted according to three different functions: ideograms, phonetic signs, and determinatives. The ideogram represented a concept. For instance, "age" was represented as a man walking with a cane. Sometimes the ideogram was metaphorical. Iversen gives the example of *hib* meaning "ibis" or "heart." The hieroglyph was an image of Thoth, either a normal ibis or its head on the body of a man. The associated meaning arose from a poetic reference to Thoth as the intimate servant of the supreme god, Ra: Thoth was the "heart" of Ra.¹⁷ A conceptual hieroglyph might be bolstered with phonetic hieroglyphs whose sounds indicated whole words, syllables, or consonants. Vowel sounds were generally implied, as in Hebrew. Scribes could decide for themselves the optimal combination of ideograms and/or phonetic signs. Given this range of choice, a scribe might add a determinative, a label

alerting the reader to the proper context. For instance, the hieroglyph of a seated man, as a determinative, indicated that the associated signs together spelled the name of a man.

Hieroglyphic writing was already developed in the First Dynasty. By the Middle Kingdom, hieroglyphs were in decline. Fluency in hieroglyphs became rare in the Roman period. A cursive form (hieratic) emerged early in the evolution of the script. A contracted form (demotic) emerged in later times. Greek and Roman travelers in Egypt were fascinated by its writing, to be seen on architecture everywhere. However, they did not bequeath to us a comprehensive account of the language. The Egyptian priests would have been reluctant to reveal the system to the profane and foreign-born. The priesthood held hieroglyphs to be a sacred gift from Thoth. “Hieroglyph” is Greek for “sacred carving.”

Christians, of course, did not regard hieroglyphs as sacred and apparently had no intellectual curiosity about them. Under the first Christian emperors, the priests of Isis managed to survive in remote regions, such as the island of Philae, at the southern boundary of Roman Egypt. There, on the Gate of Hadrian, we find the last known example of the living tradition of hieroglyphic writing, dated to 394. Parts of the inscription are so incompetent, they would be unintelligible were they not accompanied by equivalents in demotic. Over time, the very memory of hieroglyphs became vague and distorted.

HIEROGLYPHS MISCONSTRUED

Titus Flavius Clemens, better known as Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215), recognized the different styles of Egyptian script—formal, hieratic, demotic. He seems to have understood the basic variety of signs—phonetic, conceptual, metaphorical—although his explanation is somewhat confusing.¹⁸ A specific hieroglyph, like a specific word in English, has prescribed meanings, not entirely elastic meanings. Elasticity occurs in a scribe’s creative combination of ideas, words, sounds, puns, modifiers, etc. But the imprecise comments of Clement and others

fostered an erroneous belief, namely that any given sample of Egyptian script deliberately invited a variety of interpretations.

Plotinus (205–270) was one of the founders of Neoplatonism, that school of mysticism that extends Plato's metaphysics. Plotinus was a Greek, born in Egypt. He honored the Egyptian gods. Nevertheless, he did not comprehend hieroglyphs. Plotinus and his followers show no knowledge of hieroglyphs as conventional ideograms and/or phonetic signs. He found the script attractive because he assumed that it was more enlightened than Greek or Latin. While those languages are linear in structure, he thought that hieroglyphs were somehow holistic, impressing the mind simultaneously and completely. In effect, he regarded hieroglyphs as imparting revelations, rather than discursive thought. Of course, he was following his natural inclination: although an intellectual, he favored mystical thought over intellectual thought.

Plotinus is sometimes said to have believed that hieroglyphs were contrived to communicate on several levels. I do not find that he actually stated this notion in his writings, but it was certainly popular among later Neoplatonists. They similarly sought multilevel interpretations for Greek literature, such as Homer's poetry. The most innocent statements could be made to yield philosophical ideas that, in the minds of Neoplatonists, confirmed their doctrines.

Esoterists resorted to a further development of the theory of multilevel hieroglyphs: the Egyptian priests supposedly invented hieroglyphs to communicate with an elite readership, while the insensitive herd would never comprehend them. In a slightly different ploy, the hieroglyphs were supposed to possess two distinct spheres of meaning, one sacred (for the priests) and one mundane (for the commoners). In yet another variation, the Egyptians were credited with two different scripts, one sacred and one secular.

THE *HIEROGLYPHICA*

The *Hieroglyphica*, a Greek manuscript purporting to translate Egyptian writing, appeared at the end of the Roman Empire, if not later. The

dictionary is attributed to Horapollo, but his identity and the age of the manuscript are problematic. The *Hieroglyphica* correctly says that a drawing of an ibis means “heart.” “For this animal is consecrated to Hermes [Thoth], the lord of every heart and reasoning. The Ibis also is itself in its own shape like the heart, respecting which great discussions are maintained by the Egyptians.”¹⁹ A. T. Cory also connects Thoth to the image of the crane in the *Hieroglyphica*. “When they would symbolise *a man that guards himself from the plots of his enemies*, they depict A CRANE ON THE WATCH, for these birds guard themselves by watching in turns during the whole night.” Cory says that Thoth “was always considered a guardian of the land.”²⁰ A flying crane supposedly represented “*a man skilled in celestial matters*.” Cory reminds us that Thoth was the inventor of astronomy.²¹

I will return to the *Hieroglyphica* and its relevance to specific Tarot trumps when our survey intersects with the dictionary’s arrival in Renaissance courts (see [chapter 4](#)).

2

Eastern Cards: Interpretation and Influence



CHINA

Dice are the earliest ancestors of playing cards. The dice that are common today, and were common in ancient Egypt and China, are cubes with flat surfaces that display pips. A basic playing card has a flat surface that displays pips.

Two regular dice in combination can produce 21 different “throws.” The Chinese invented dominoes by depicting each of those 21 combinations. A slightly different version of dominoes is now universal: it typically has seven more faces, because some compartments are blank (a feature added after dominoes migrated to the Western world).

China provides the oldest evidence of playing cards, for, according to records, Domino Cards existed there in the ninth century. They were paper dominoes. As such, they could be shuffled and dealt in a card game. A deck of only 21 cards would be insufficient for a game of any complexity. The Chinese therefore duplicated and reduplicated the basic quantity in order to make a usable pack. In the card game, each card was identified as “military” or “civilian.” This appears to be the earliest concept of suits, although they had no suit-signs. Within the suits, the cards perforce had a hierarchy—used in a trick-taking game—but the cards lacked specific

notations for their ranks. The hierarchy was simply memorized. No court cards were provided.

PERSIA AND INDIA

Medieval Persia is known to have developed a 96-card deck. No authenticated examples have been discovered from the culture; but they are plentiful in India. The deck was introduced by the Muslims who invaded and controlled India. The favored game was a trick-taking game.

“Mogul pack” is the English term for the 96-card deck in India. The courts in each of its eight suits are the King or Commander (*Mir*, *Raja*, *Shah*) and the Viceroy or Vizier (*Wasir*). The suits are still identified by Persian names: *Surkh* (Red), *Sefid* (White), *Gholam* (Slave), *Taj* (Crown), *Shamsher* (Sword), *Chang* (Harp), *Bharat* (Document), *Qimash* (Merchandise, Furniture, Textiles—represented as an oval bolster, especially familiar on the thrones of Asian potentates). *Surkh* and *Sefid* are represented as coins, gold and silver respectively; and they are sometimes given other names expressly denoting gold and silver currency.

On the model of the Muslim import, Hindus created indigenous packs, the *Dasavatara* and the *Ramayana*, both used in trick-taking games. The *Dasavatara* pack was given ten suits so that the suit-signs could be made to symbolize the ten incarnations of Vishnu. The other pack has 12 suits with suit-signs alluding to events recounted in the epic *Ramayana*.

The Persian term for cards and the playing of cards is *ganjifa* or *ganjafeh*. These words reappear in India, along with variations (*ganjafa*, *gangifo*, *ganjpa*, etc.).

EGYPT

In medieval Egypt, the term for cards was *kanjifa* (sometimes *kanjafa*).

The oldest surviving Muslim cards are those used by the Mamelukes, militaristic Asians who were enslaved and taken to the Middle East. They rose to positions of responsibility and at length assumed control. They

created a distinctive culture. Their card deck consisted of 52 cards divided into 4 suits. Each suit had 10 numeral cards and 3 court cards. The Arabic names for the courts were *Malik* (Commander), *Na'ib Malik* (Lieutenant Commander) and *Thani Na'ib* (Second Lieutenant). The suit-signs were Coins, Swords, Cups, and Sticks. The Sticks were Polo Mallets, according to inscriptions on the beautifully painted deck conserved in the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul. Professor Esin Atil suggests that the Topkapi deck originated in Cairo but was among the spoils taken to Istanbul in 1517 when the Ottoman Turks conquered the Mameluke Egyptians.¹ Dr. Rudolf von Leyden thought the deck could have been made in Syria, which was greatly influenced by the Mamelukes.²

The Mameluke suit-signs surely refer to some of the officers in the sultan's court. This recognition was developed by von Leyden, a scholar of Asian cultures.³ The sultan's polo master, cup bearer, and sword bearer carried the obvious implements, and those implements were depicted on badges that the officers wore as heraldic devices. Other officers were awarded comparable emblems: pen box, napkin, archer's bow, etc. They appeared not only on clothing but on buildings and various possessions in different materials. These honors became hereditary. Noblemen occasionally inherited more than one badge. The badges certainly seem related to the suit-signs, but the two sets of emblems are not visually congruent. For instance, the badge for the polo master can have sticks exactly like long canes with curved handles, while the Polo Sticks on the Topkapi cards have quite different shapes (some rectilinear and angular, some S-shaped, some topped with C-shaped elements; the S and the C tend to end in dragon heads: see [figure 2.1](#)). The Topkapi deck has not yielded all of its secrets.

Von Leyden was not able to adduce the coin as a Mameluke blazon. He thought that such a badge might have belonged to the sultan's exchequer but that examples were too rare to locate. I have found a cogent example on a glass lamp in London's Victoria and Albert Museum.⁴ The lamp bears a painted rosette consisting of a radial cluster of six white lobes in a red circle ([figure 2.2](#)). The motif repeats on the lamp's neck and body, in positions where we are accustomed to seeing the courtly badges. This particular rosette seems uncommon, although similar ones with more

lobes and reversed colors are familiar. The emblem of course is open to interpretation, but the association with a coin seems probable: this lamp, according to its enameled inscription, belonged to Kafur al-Rumi. He was treasurer for Sultan Isma‘il, who reigned in the years 1342 to 1345. If the treasurer al-Rumi used a coin or coin-like shape as his blazon, other Mameluke treasurers probably did the same.



Figure 2.1. Author's drawing of a Five of Polo Sticks, handcrafted, Mameluke culture, ca. 1500. (Original: Topkapi Museum, Istanbul.)

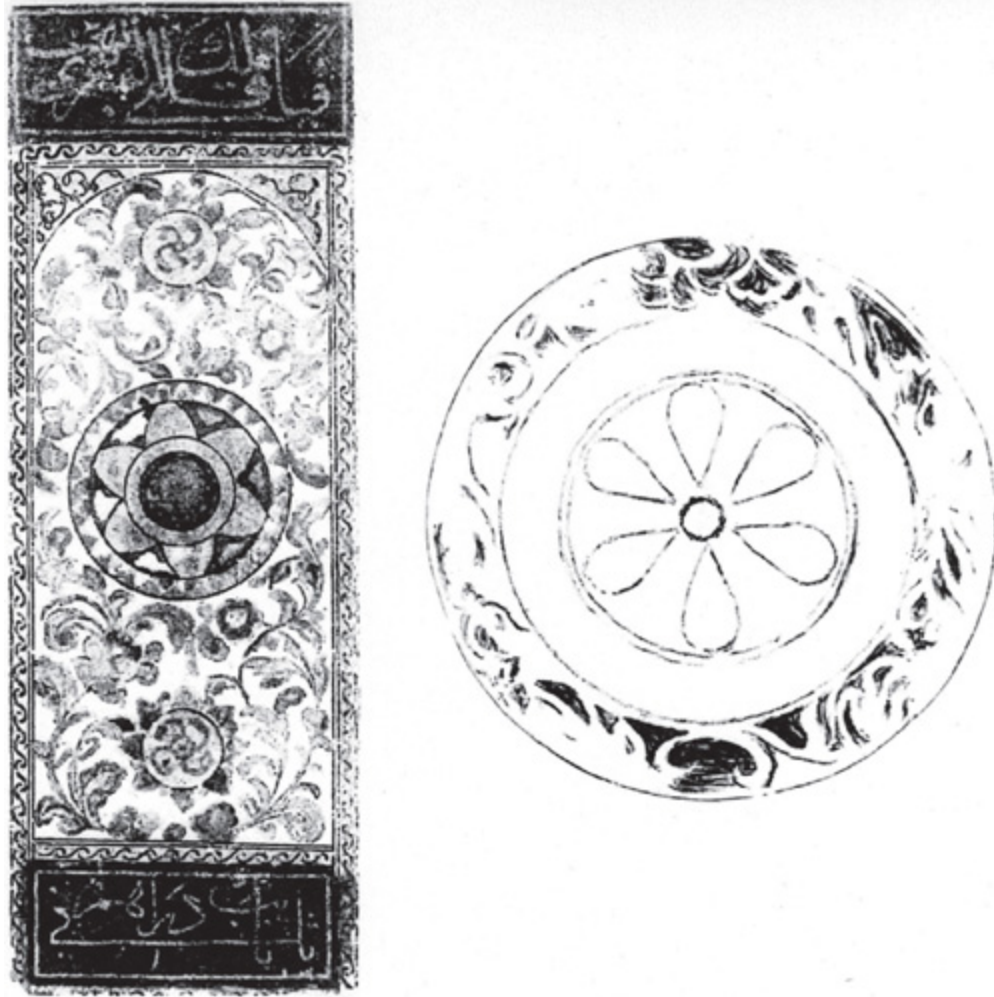


Figure 2.2. Left: Author's drawing of an Ace of Coins, handcrafted, Mameluke culture, ca. 1500. (Original: Topkapi Museum, Istanbul.) Right: Author's drawing of a badge on a Mameluke lamp, enameled glass, commissioned by Kafur al-Rumi, ca. 1345. (Original: Islamic item, 6820–1860, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.)

If other types of card decks existed in the Middle East, they apparently did not percolate through to Europe. We know of no examples brought home by European pilgrims, diplomats, or meandering merchants. In 1344, a papal embargo on Muslim goods was lifted, and a surge of Eastern products flowed directly to Venice and Genoa. This would have facilitated the influx of Mameluke cards, for the Mamelukes were the Muslim contacts favored by Italian shippers.

In addition to the Topkapi cards, compatible fragments from other Muslim cards (numeral cards) have been inventoried.⁵ These fragments are described as drawings, but they should be reexamined to determine

whether they are instead woodcut prints. (I have seen only inadequate photographs.)

I think that woodcut cards must have been common among Muslims at the time of the Topkapi deck (ca. 1500). That deck is really an amalgam of several decks. This indicates that card makers worked in standard dimensions. Why would they have been consistent from deck to deck? I assume that standardization had arisen through mass production. And the only feasible method for this production was the woodcut technique.

THEORY: TURKISH AND CENTRAL ASIAN ORIGINS

Michael Dummett, using the clues from China, Persia, India, and Egypt, deduced the nature of the first 4-suit deck.⁶ Domino cards must have traveled westward, probably following the so-called Silk Road. Here lay important trading centers, at Turfan, Kashgar, Samarkand, Merv, and across Persia to the Middle East. Somewhere along this route—Dummett suggested northern Persia—the locals rationalized the structure of the card pack. They presumably created distinctive emblems for the suits. I note the Chinese use of the coin (a symbol of good luck) as a decorative motif on surviving Domino cards. We have no examples of an early date, but we can imagine that the ornamental coin was present and prompted the Persians or their neighbors to adopt it as a suit-sign in their new deck. Almost certainly, the Persian suits included Coins. In view of later developments, other suits may have been Swords and Sticks. Each suit would have had 10 numeral cards and 2 court cards. The 2 court cards are still found in the Mogul deck, and Coins and Swords are among its suit-signs. In Egypt, an extra court card appeared, but the number of suits remained at 4. If we hypothesize a Central Asian origin, we can say that as cards migrated to Persia, they gained suits; as cards migrated to Egypt, they gained a court card (still more in Europe).

The 4-suit pack apparently migrated to China, too. There, the Coins must have inspired the Chinese Money decks. One of their suits is of “Cash,” the Chinese coin with a central perforation. Those coins—the real ones—were strung on laces. Strings of Coins appear as another suit in the

Money decks. The Strings, shown as columns of coins, could have derived from the Baton suit, if it was imported from the western end of the Silk Road.

The Topkapi deck, although lavishly painted, is a makeshift example. The court cards have suit-signs but no pictures. In fact, the more opulent of the Topkapi court cards formerly were numeral cards—mostly Aces, Deuces, and Treys—borrowed from other packs. The courts have attained their new status by the intrusion of labels in Arabic. That is valuable information (see above for the court cards' Arabic names). On the other hand, we are cheated of the representational court cards that probably appeared in more typical Mameluke decks. Historians have found no convincing examples of figural court cards native to the Middle East. Yet, following Dummett's lead, I suppose that pictorial court cards existed in the Mameluke culture. They are known to the east, in India, and to the west, in Europe. We can reasonably assume that those eastern and western court cards descended from mutual ancestors. The Mamelukes could have accepted those models. The Mamelukes, unlike some other Islamic groups, had no aversion to representational art.

I agree with Dummett that the 4-suit deck was invented along the Silk Road, and a point in northern Persia would be plausible. However, I would prefer southeastern Turkey, namely the community of Harran. In that locale, the Cup, Coin, Sword, and Stick would have had significance as Hermetic emblems. Hermetism, although it originated in Egypt, had staunch adherents among the Harranian Sabians in ancient Turkey.

THEORY: HERMETIC AND SABIAN SYMBOLISM

Harran was founded by one of the earliest civilizations, perhaps before 2000 BC.⁷ The city is mentioned in the Old Testament. Here was located a famous temple of the moon god Sin, who remained prominent in the subsequent cultures of Mesopotamia. Under Assyrian rule, Harran was an important trade center on the route between Nineveh and Carchemish. In 609 BC, the Babylonians defeated the Assyrians at Harran. Its Greek name was *Charan* or *Charran*. The Romans called it *Carrhae*. The jurisdiction

over Harran alternated during the wars between Rome and Parthia. The city again occupied an important commercial location, on the east-west Silk Road. That geography fostered a convergence of exotic concepts, including features of Greek Neoplatonism, Persian Zoroastrianism, and Chinese alchemy. The assimilation of Hermetism made Harran a celebrated center for magic and astrology. (Harran was the sometime home of the biblical Abraham. In a few nonbiblical sources, he was extolled as a great astrologer.) According to later observers, the Harranites consciously credited their tradition not only to Hermes and Agathodemon, but, quite properly, to Plato. The Egyptian origin of Hermes and Agathodemon was preserved in a myth that their tombs still existed—as the two largest pyramids at Gizeh.⁸

The Harranites held tenaciously to their syncretic religion. When the Roman authorities imposed Christianity throughout the empire, the Harranites refused to convert. Harran was protected by its Asian neighbors, beyond Rome's eastern frontier. In AD 639, the incursion of Muslim armies across northern Mesopotamia may have placed the Harranian pagans in another dilemma about their faith. According to legend, the Muslim conqueror insisted on a choice: religious conformity or death. However, the Koran allowed an exemption for Jews, Christians, and Sabians, all three groups dignified as "people of the book." Muhammad apparently honored their respective books as authentic revelations. At the same time, his reference to "Sabians" is unclear: who were they? The Harranian pagans insinuated themselves. This had some force, because the Harranites indeed possessed their own sacred scripture, the *Hermetica*. The Muslim invaders accepted the Harranites as Sabians. Thus the city retained its citizens, their exotic blend of paganism, and their remarkable schools and temples. I cannot confirm or deny the truth of this story. I confess that it has the look of an urban legend. The Muslims of that culture generally have a reputation for intellectual and religious tolerance. The famous philosopher Thabit ibn Kurrah (died 901) is said to have been a Sabian but nevertheless enjoyed a good reputation among Muslims.

In the next century, Harran was an innocent casualty of the wars between the Caliphate of Baghdad and the Byzantine Empire. Muslim chroniclers of the period report the destruction of the temple of Sin.

Modern scholars speculate that the upsurge of Hermetic and Neoplatonic interest at Byzantium is attributable to the influx of refugees from Harran. The Byzantines probably had access to the *Corpus Hermeticum* that we have today. It is doubtless a redaction by Byzantine scholars wishing to preserve only that which seemed compatible with Christianity. Michael Psellus, an eleventh-century Neoplatonist in Byzantium, certainly knew some version of the *Corpus*.

Hermetism and Christianity, along with the other mainstream religions, revered angels. They were viewed as guardians of individuals, nations, and planets. Harran reputedly possessed temples not only for the moon god but for all the planetary spirits worshiped by the ancients.⁹ Each temple had its peculiar floor plan for a chamber with a specific color and with a metal statue elevated on a dais having a specific number of steps.

Planet	Floor Plan	Interior Color	Metal Sculpture	Steps
Saturn	hexagon	black	lead	nine
Jupiter	triangle	green	tin	eight
Mars	rectangle	red	iron	seven
Sun	square	gold	gold	six
Venus	isosceles triangle	blue	copper	five
Mercury	square in hexagon	brown	mercury-filled	four
Moon	pentagon	white	silver	three

The temples probably suffered in the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. The Mongols also disrupted the commercial routes that sustained the city, and it became uninhabitable. It was completely abandoned in 1271. Today the area is sparsely populated, and its Sabian ruins are nearly gone.

Information about Sabian symbols is not entirely lost. They are frequently cited in an Arabic book called the *Picatrix*. It is better called *The Goal of Sages* or *Goal of the Wise*. One modern author says that the *Picatrix* probably dates from the late twelfth century.¹⁰ Another says “circa 1050.”¹¹ Alfonso X (1221–1284), King of Castile and Leon, ordered

the translation of the *Picatrix* from Arabic to Spanish. “Picatrix” really refers to an individual whom the text cites as one of its authorities. The name has been corrupted by generations of uninformed copyists in different cultures. Scholars assume that the original name is beyond retrieval. They have neglected the obvious restoration: Pythagoras. The starting point would have been something like Pitagoras, common enough in medieval manuscripts. Then a series of further abuses—such as Pitacorix, Piactorix, Picatorix—could have led to Picatrix. Of course, I don’t mean to suggest that Pythagoras actually wrote the *Goal of the Wise*. He could have been cited merely to give special status to the book. Plato is cited for this reason. Whatever the intention of the book’s popular title, the contents will help us to understand the Tarot (here and in [chapter 6](#)).

Artists and magicians used objects, materials, and qualities as symbols of the planetary deities. We have already seen examples in the shapes, colors, metals, and numbers that the Sabians used in their celebrated temples. The planetary correspondences were very specific. The *Picatrix* says, “You need to know the food, drink, fabric, incense, time, profession, materials, demands, what kind of sacrificial animal, engraved stones or charms, enigmas, astronomical proportions and revealing spirits and everything related to these planets to be able to succeed in connecting the sky’s power with the earth’s power.”¹² This passage refers to the importance of precision in making talismans and invoking planetary spirits through ceremonial magic.

The *Picatrix* quotes from a book called *Secret of Secrets* by a certain Utarid Al Babel, meaning Hermes of Babylon. This Hermes (heir to Thoth-Hermes?) says that the two goddesses, Luna and Venus, are closely allied: “The Moon might respond to what was asked of Venus, and Venus might respond to what was asked of the Moon.”¹³ Similarly, he says, “The Sun might respond to what was asked of Mars, and Mars might respond to what was asked of the Sun.”¹⁴

Thus we have close connections among certain planetary deities. I envision their emblems as the earliest suit-signs:

Coins of gold = Sun (Gold was thought to have been generated by the sun.)

Swords = Mars (patron of war)

Cups = Venus (patroness of pleasure)

Sticks = Moon (identified with Sin or Thoth, both shown carrying a stick)

The Harranian Sabians knew a wide range of mythologies. The priests knew a variety of lunar deities: Sin, Artemis, Selene, Diana, and Thoth. Sin was depicted as an old man leaning on a staff.¹⁵ I do not know whether the lunar goddesses were imagined as carrying sticks. A measuring stick would have been apt for all of them, because the moon's cycle serves to measure time. (*Moon, month, menses, mensuration* all derive from the same root word.) Thoth certainly carried a stick, namely his wand with its markings for the days of the calendar (recall [figure 1.2](#)). In the *Picatrix*, we have an example of a Hermetic talisman to assist travelers. It bears the image of ibis-headed Thoth with his measuring stick, although the depiction has been reduced to "a man with the head of a bird leaning on a cane."¹⁶ The calibrated stalk, as the playing-card Stick, could easily have become the Chinese suit of Strings, which are slender columns of coins with uniform striations (the short horizontals delineating the stacked coins).

Different combinations unite the four deities represented in my hypothetical deck. The Moon and the Sun are siblings, one watery and one fiery. Venus and Mars are lovers, one watery and one fiery. But fiery Mars is negative (aggressive, bloodthirsty), while the fiery Sun is positive (energizing, healing). Watery Venus is positive, while the watery Moon can be negative (notwithstanding the connections to wise Thoth and beautiful Diana). On the negativity of the moon, compare its Latin name, *Luna*, with the English word "lunacy." Moonlight supposedly induced insanity.

Why would a Sabian deck so greatly emphasize fire and water? The *Picatrix* describes a rite in a Sabian temple in which a blindfolded youth is tested as he stands before fire and water in their respective bowls. Both fire and water are common in rites of purification, but those elements also could be distinctly Hermetic in their symbolism. According to the *Corpus*

Hermeticum, the world began as roiling moisture suddenly informed by a burst of flames.

I have reasoned that a direct descendant of the first card deck is the Mogul pack. The planets are surely symbolized there (although I have not found this observation among other authors). The Mogul suit-signs, all eight of them, conform to celestial powers in a coherent program. It involves all the planets in the ancient tabulation (which included sun and moon).

Gold Coin = Sun (Gold was the sun's metal.)

Silver Coin = Moon (Silver was the moon's metal.)

Slave = Saturn (in myth, an outcast; in astrology, the patron of outcasts)

Crown = Jupiter (king of the gods on Olympus)

Sword = Mars (patron of war)

Harp = Venus (patroness of pleasure)

Document = Mercury (a scholar in medieval Islam and Christendom)

Bolsters = Part of Fortune

Most esoterists will understand the above interpretations, with the possible exception of the Part of Fortune. It acts quite like a planet in an astrological chart (horoscope). The total configuration symbolizes the prevailing conditions at a given moment, such as a person's birth. Fortune's "part" or "point" or "lot" symbolizes material wealth. It is located in the horoscope by subtracting the arc of the sun from the arc of the moon, then casting the result from the Ascendant (the eastern horizon where the zodiac rises). The resulting point is allotted to Fortune. I provide much more on "lots" in [chapter 6](#).

The traditional use of the Mogul deck surely preserves something of the ancient symbolism. Indian card players still refer to the gold (or red)

suit-sign as “the sun,” and the silver (or white) suit-sign as “the moon.” When the game occurs in the daytime, the trick is led by the player who has been dealt the King of Gold Coins. In a nighttime game, the signifying card is the King of Silver Coins.

Card makers likewise have preserved astrological symbolism in the Mogul pack. The King of Gold Coins actually shows the sun, usually shining above a lion or tiger (the original reference was to the lion as a solar symbol: the Sun rules the sign of Leo). The Viceroy of this suit is a solar angel riding on a lion or tiger. In the suit of Slaves (Saturn’s suit, in my interpretation), the King rides an elephant; the Viceroy rides an ox or an ox-drawn cart. Elephants and oxen, usually of subdued temperament and subdued color, are saturnine creatures. In the suit of Harps (which I see as Venus’s suit), the court figures are allowed to be female. In the Viceroy of this suit, the figure rides a camel, a “venereal” creature. Westerners might expect to find female courts in the moon’s suit; but in the Hindu pantheon, the lunar deity is a god, Chandra. Thus, the suit of Silver Coins has male figures. (In that suit—as in the Crowns, Swords, Documents, and Bolsters—the Viceroys ride on horses. I see no special astrology here, although the myths of Diana, Jupiter, and Mars supply horses and horse-drawn chariots.)

Some of the backgrounds for the Mogul suit-signs have significant colors. This is especially orderly in the traditional packs of Rajasthan. The saturnine Slaves have a background of gold or yellow (possibly because Saturn ruled over the Age of Gold). The Crowns (symbolic of Jupiter, I say) have a background of maroon or purple, the color of royalty. The Swords (surely for Mars, god of war) stand against red, the color of fire and blood. The Harps (for Venus, goddess of beauty and romance) stand against green, the color of growth and hope. The Documents (for Mercury, the scribe) are surrounded by brown, the color that the Harranian Sabians allotted to Mercury. In the cards, this brown sometimes becomes orange and even red. Of possible relevance is astrological alchemy: the pigment of cinnabar (orange or red) is a compound of quicksilver (i.e., mercury). The suit of Bolsters (which I assign to the Part of Fortune) have backgrounds of an earth color, such as tan or beige. The Silver Coins are set against black, normally the color of Saturn but here connoting the night sky. The Gold Coins are set against yellow-green, combining the color of

sunshine and the color of fertility. (Blue could have been used to indicate the daytime sky, but blue pigment was highly expensive until the modern period. Cards in Orissa and Kashmir now give blue backgrounds to the “sun” suit.)

I have dwelt on the possible symbolism of Mogul cards because they may preserve aspects of the pack that I would trace to the Harranian Sabians. This would have been the ancestor of other cards that traveled westward and carried symbols that eventually became part of the Tarot. An important way station would have been the Mameluke realm.

Did astrological symbolism endure in the Mameluke cards? If lunar Sticks on the Harranites’ cards inspired the suit of Sticks among the Mamelukes, the latter evidently redesigned the suit-sign into something more familiar to them. The Topkapi deck specifies Polo Mallets. Interestingly, polo sticks apparently possessed a lunar symbolism. Rudolf von Leyden noted a badge in which two polo sticks (shaped like canes with semicircular handles) appear between two crescent moons ([figure 2.3](#)). Furthermore, in the Topkapi deck, the Sticks frequently terminate in those peculiar dragon heads. They seem utterly impractical as attachments on polo sticks, but the dragon does have a lunar symbolism: the sinuous course of the moon was likened to an undulating dragon. Astrologers will remember the Head of the Dragon and the Tail of the Dragon (the two shifting “nodes” where the moon, ascending and descending, crosses the ecliptic). The moon possesses affinities with aquatic creatures and with water. Water periodically shifts as the tides (a lunar effect) and condenses as the dew (formerly thought by some to be a lunar effect). In the Topkapi deck, Sticks sometimes merge with crescents, obvious allusions to the moon, and with stylized ducks, “correspondences” for the watery planets.

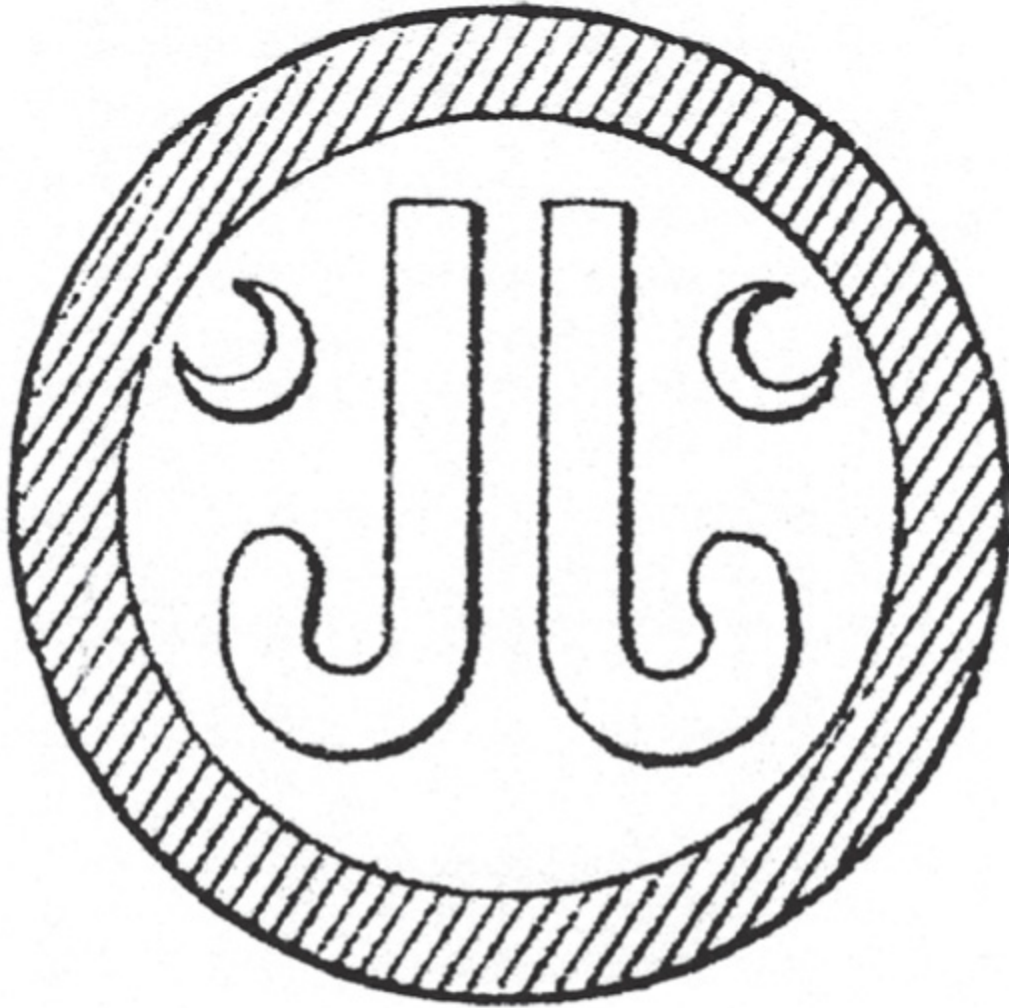


Figure 2.3. Mameluke badge for Polo Master. (From Artin Pacha, 1902; see bibliography.)

Venus is likewise of a watery nature; and, in the Topkapi deck, ducks are attached to Venus's suit of Cups. According to one myth about Venus, she was born from sea foam in the waters near Cyprus. The name "Cyprus" is related to "Copper," which was mined on the island. As we saw in the Sabian temple, Venus's metallic correspondence is copper. It acquires a green patina, reminiscent of the green in the suit of Harps in the Mogul cards. Again, Venus is the goddess of love, beauty, and pleasure. The pleasures of partying, drinking, and dining are associated with Venus in Mameluke art, where she commonly holds a musical instrument or a cup.

The Mamelukes certainly depicted Mars with a sword.

They knew that gold (as in the Coins) was associated with the sun.

Thus I believe that aspects of Sabian symbolism survived quite well in Muslim cards, those of the Mogul deck and those of the Mameluke deck. After all, Hermetic correspondences were accessible to Muslims everywhere. I again would interpret the Coins as solar, the Swords as martial, the Cups as venereal (or, more probably, venerable), the Sticks as lunar.

Worth mentioning is an Asian custom of likening the royal court to the “celestial court” of the planets. Perhaps this applied to the Mameluke court and its playing cards. If so, the suit-signs could be both the badges of courtiers and the emblems of planets. We could say that the courtly symbolism was exoteric and the Hermetic symbolism was esoteric.

ENTRY INTO EUROPE

When card decks reached western Europe, their basic structure must have been like that in the typical Mameluke deck: 52 cards in 4 suits, each with 3 courts (male figures). The manufacture of playing cards began apace in Europe. Printmaking was one of the first “assembly line” operations, and cards were among the first prints in Europe. The Mameluke suit-signs were adopted but with local adaptations; the Polo Sticks were changed by all the European card makers. They presumably did not understand the Mameluke Sticks. The sport of polo was not yet known in western Europe. Italian card makers remodeled the imported Sticks into polished wands (*Bastoni*, *Batons*), which became standard. Gnarled cudgels, *Bastos*, became standard in Spanish cards.

European monarchs and nobles enjoyed card playing, and their financial records indicate payments to artists for the rendering of handcrafted decks. The commoners must have relied on relatively cheap woodcut decks. Their use clearly became widespread by the 1370s, for that decade saw an increasing spate of ordinances that curtailed or prohibited card playing among the lower classes. Such laws have been found across western Europe. The oldest of these in Italy has been discovered among Florentine records for 23 March 1376 (1377 by modern calculations; in medieval Florence, the new year did not begin until 25 March). The term

used was *naibbe*.¹⁷ It manifestly derived from the Arabic *Na'ib*. The Europeans apparently misunderstood the name that properly referred to the ranks of certain Mameluke court cards and applied it to playing cards in general. The Italian for “playing cards” became *naibbe*, *naibbi*, and *naibi*, although these terms are no longer in use. *Naipe*, the Spanish word for “playing card,” also derives from *Na'ib*.

Still more evidence insists that the first Italian cards derived from Muslim models. Three different fifteenth-century manuscripts give somewhat garbled statements originating in fourteenth-century chronicles of Viterbo. The original entry can be reconstructed to say, “In the year 1379 there was brought to Viterbo the game of cards, which in the Saracen language is called *nayb*.”¹⁸ In 1408, Charles of Orléans began to inventory the property of his late mother, Valentina Visconti. She had come from Lombardy, and her possessions included Lombard games and “Saracen” games.¹⁹

THE TAROT SUITS

By my reckoning, the *Tarot de Marseille* substantially preserves the oldest Tarot. I will refer principally to the 1760 version by Nicolas Conver, a card maker in Marseilles, in southern France. Despite his time and place, I am confident that his deck descends from fifteenth-century Italy (more of this later).

The suit cards of the *Tarot de Marseille* share features with the old Mameluke counterparts. In both decks, some of the Swords are scimitars, having curved blades. Interlacing, seen in the Topkapi Polo Sticks, also occurs in the Tarot’s Batons. The Two of Cups in the *Tarot de Marseille* has decorative creatures, dragons that spring from floral tracery; they possibly were akin to the dragon heads decorating some of the Topkapi Sticks. (I am agnostic on this last point: the monsters on the Two of Cups could also be late examples of Gothic fantasies or early examples of Renaissance grotesques.)

In the *Tarot de Marseille*, on the Ace of Swords and the Ace of Batons, the central emblems are surrounded by airborne flames or scintillations

(figure 2.4). In medieval art, they indicate supernatural influence, as from God, or the angels, or the planetary deities. I suspect that the Italians recognized the astrological symbolism that I have posited for the Mameluke suit-signs. According to my theory, the Mamelukes revised the Sabian suit-sign for the moon and so converted the unfamiliar Staff of Thoth/Sin into the lunar Polo Stick. In the same way, the Europeans could have adapted the Polo Stick to their own culture, choosing a different emblem but preserving the lunar connotation. I regard the Italians' Baton as a pilgrim's staff. It certainly resembles the Baton in the earliest cards (figure 2.5). In prints of the time, we see that pilgrims are among those mortals who are under the protection of the Moon (figure 2.6). She is patroness of all travelers, because of her own circuitous route and rapid pace. The Moon also patronizes peasants, for she presides over the biology of forests, fields, and farms. Those peasants carried cudgels for tending their animals and deterring predators. Among the Batons of the *Tarot de Marseille*, the peasant cudgel is the usual suit-sign for the Ace, Page, and Knight (sometimes for the Queen and King).

The Hermetic/Sabian/Mameluke astrology is intact in the Tarot:

Coins = Sun Swords = Mars Cups = Venus Staves/Cudgels = Moon²⁰

In this case, the Cups are definitely not venereal but are venerable. The *Marseille* Ace of Cups is a liturgical chalice, perhaps even the Holy Grail. Emma Jung cites a mythic image of Venus actually dwelling in the Holy Grail.²¹ Apparently the love of Venus has blended with the love of Christ. The Holy Grail is obvious in certain Aces of Cups painted in fifteenth-century Italy.²² The Cup spouts two symmetrical arcs of blood that flank an upright spear. It is the lance of Longinus, the centurion who pierced the side of Christ as he hung on the cross. The whole Grail vision—chalice, arcs of blood, and vertical lance—greeted the knights of King Arthur when they accomplished their quest. Especially striking is an Ace of Cups in the Deutsches Spielkartenmuseum (Leinfelden). Here, the base of the Grail is encircled by a levitating serpent, biting its own tail (figure 2.7). That is the ouroboros, an Egyptian symbol of the cosmos and eternity. The symbol was widely known but was especially valued by Hermetists.

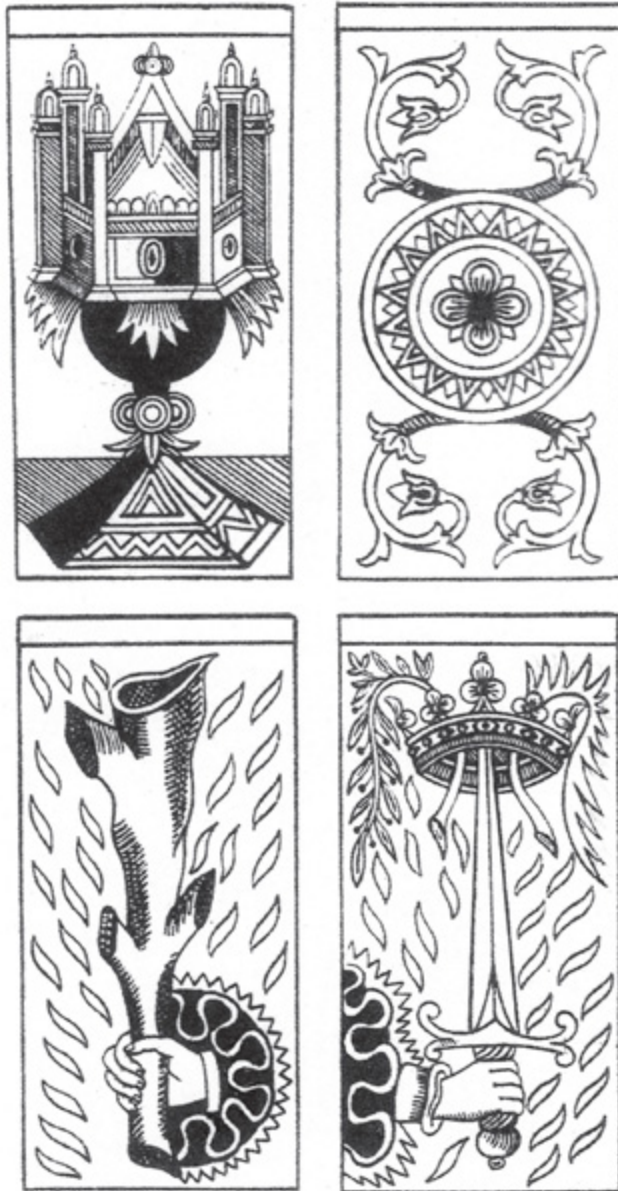


Figure 2.4. *Tarot de Marseille*, four Aces, redrawn from woodcut Tarot by Nicolas Conver, Marseilles, 1760. (Courtesy of Lehner, 1956; see bibliography.)



Figure 2.5. Above: Two of Batons, handcrafted, Italian, 1400s (original: Museo Correr, Venice); Queen of Batons, *Tarot de Besançon*, woodcut and stencil, Swiss?, 1700s. Below: Resting pilgrim, woodcut, Dutch (from *Boeck van den Pelgheryn*, Delft, 1498). [The suit-sign of Batons recalls the pilgrim's staff.]



Figure 2.6. Pilgrims were under the patronage of the Moon (details of [figure 6.3](#)).

In the *Tarot de Marseille*, one of the Knights, two of the Pages, and all four Kings wear hats with unusually large brims. As I noted in discussing the Juggler (see my introduction), the broad-brimmed hat was a visual convention whereby medieval artists denoted figures far removed in period and/or place. The exotic headgear had a remote basis in Mongol fashions, and these actually persist among Mongolian tribes. The broad-brimmed hats in the *Marseille* court cards acknowledge that the courtiers are Muslims. In fact, the King of Swords wears a characteristic shoe ([figure 2.8](#)). Its toe curves upward, in a style familiar in Asia and the Middle East (and in some European folk costumes influenced by the Middle East). I do not regard these Kings as faithful copies of Kings from some Mameluke deck. I only observe that the European designer, in creating these exotic images, has displayed an awareness that playing cards came from another realm, somewhere in the Muslim world.

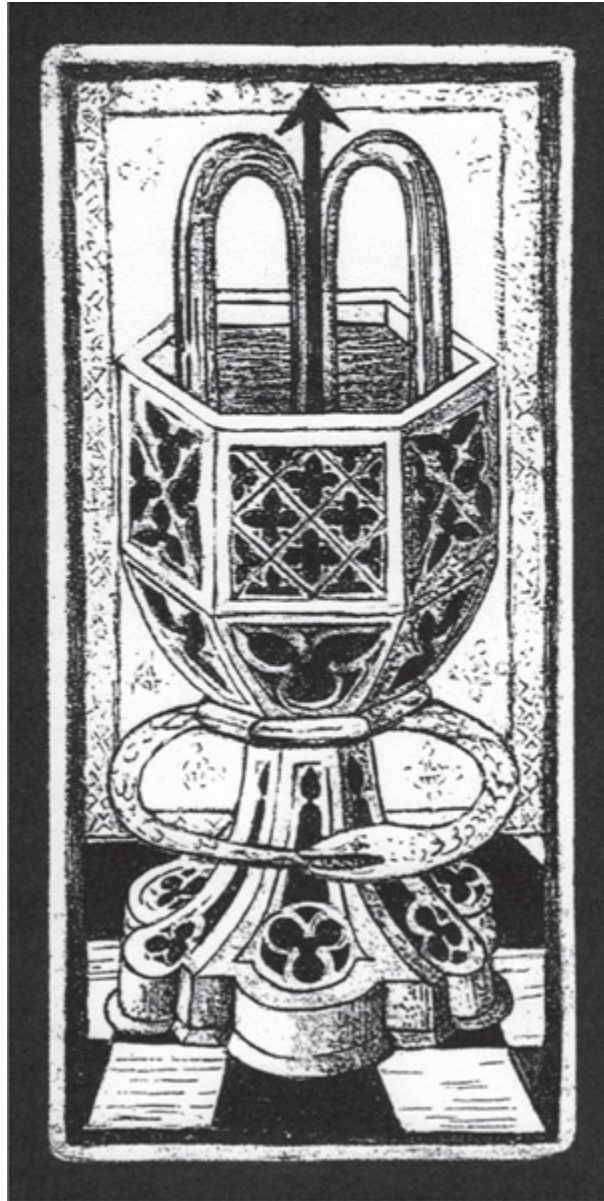


Figure 2.7. Author's drawing of Ace of Cups (Holy Grail with ouroboros), handcrafted, Italian?, 1400s. (Original: B226, Deutsches Spielkartenmuseum, Leinfelden, Germany.)

By adding the Queen, we have another opportunity to symbolize those same deities whom I perceive in the suit-signs. This would produce solar Kings, venerable Queens, martial Knights, and lunar Pages. The whole set of sixteen courts could embody a blending of planetary influences.



Figure 2.8. *Tarot de Marseille*, four court cards (King of Swords, King of Coins, Queen of Cups, Page of Batons), modern edition (after Nicolas Conver, Marseilles, 1760).

	Batons	Swords	Cups	Coins
Kings	Moon + Sun	Mars + Sun	Venus + Sun	SUN
Queens	Moon + Venus	Mars + Venus	VENUS	Sun + Venus
Knights	Moon + Mars	MARS	Venus + Mars	Sun + Mars
Pages	MOON	Mars + Moon	Venus + Moon	Sun + Moon

Cartomancers may wish to ponder the resulting dispositions for the court figures. The syntheses would produce different personalities. The Sun loves Venus but hates Mars and the Moon. Thus, if the court cards embody temperaments, the King and Queen of Coins would be internally harmonious, but the Knight and Page of Coins would be somewhat conflicted. Mars loves Venus but hates the Sun and Moon. Venus loves Mars, Sun, and Moon. The Moon loves Venus but hates the Sun and Mars. These relationships (also involving Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn, the Head of the Dragon, and the Tail of the Dragon) are listed by Guido Bonatti of Forlì (fl. 1260), whose *Liber Astronomiae* (*Book of Astronomy*) was a standard reference in the Renaissance.²³ As the chart shows, four of the court ranks would be special, entirely free of internal conflict. They are virtually planetary deities (King of Coins = Sun; Queen of Cups = Venus; Knight of Swords = Mars; Page of Batons = Moon).

Those four special correspondences may have visual confirmation in the *Tarot de Marseille*. The King of Money (Coins) sits with legs crossed in a meditative pose ([figure 2.8](#)), which bespeaks an Apollonian personality, one influenced by the sun god, Apollo. (The pose can be traced back through medieval portrayals of saints to ancient portrayals of poets and philosophers.) The Queen of Cups holds a vessel with a stem marked by a kind of socket, round and red, like an apple ([figure 2.8](#)). This recalls Venus, the most amorous goddess, who received an apple as the prize in a legendary beauty contest. The armored Knight of Swords would qualify as Mars. (Compare the equestrian Mars sculpted on the bell tower of the Florence cathedral.) The Page of Batons wears a distinctive cap (a Phrygian cap?), which may indicate a traveler (therefore a ward of the Moon). Much later, we will find that modern cartomancers surprisingly interpret this card as “a foreigner.”

This planetary symbolism resembles another system that had acquired four categories. Medieval philosophers contrasted two temperaments, active and contemplative. The late Middle Ages found another type: the amorous. In the Renaissance, a fourth category was sometimes enrolled: the outcast or social dropout. Extreme cases were represented as “wild men,” primitive forest dwellers, usually covered with hair and armed with cudgels. The Page of Batons holds a heavy cudgel ([figure 2.8](#)). The Tarot

may well exhibit contemplative Kings, amorous Queens, active Knights, and alienated Pages.

HERMETIC NUMERAL CARDS?

The Mameluke cards brought with them a seemingly bizarre feature. In the Italian decks, the cards in the “long suits” (Bats and Swords), in descending order, ranked as King, Knight, Page, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, Ace. The cards in the “round suits” (Cups and Coins), in descending order, ranked as King, Knight, Page, Ace, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. For a while, this curious ranking was standard in the Tarot suits (which of course place a Queen between the King and the Knight). The peculiar ranking continues down to the present in a few locations and also in a few other decks.²⁴ Tarot players in Sicily and France preferred uniform ranking across the suits and accepted the model of the long suits, whose ranking seems the more intuitive (cards having greater quantities of suit-signs beat cards having lesser quantities). This is the practice with the *Tarot de Marseille*.

Hermetism can explain why half the suits have reverse rankings for their numeral cards. The Hermetists borrowed from the Pythagoreans, for whom numerals have not only quantitative values but qualitative values, too. For instance, the number One possessed the first position and the strongest qualities (pure potential, free of conflict, utterly integrated). More strictly, Unity is not a number at all but the source of numeration. Oneness cannot itself be involved in numeration, for the essence of numeration is multiplicity.

When we think as a Pythagorean, we can see a subtle rationale for the ranking of the numeral cards in Mameluke decks (and, almost certainly, in their Asian prototypes). Recall my hypothesis that the Cups and Coins symbolize beneficent deities, while the Swords and the Sticks are more malevolent. In the “round” suits, the Ace is highest because it represents the Pythagorean One, the most concentrated power. The further we proceed along the numerical ranks, the further we recede from Unity; so Ten is the most remote, the most dilute. The Ten deserves to be the low card in those suits. The suits with “long” suit-signs are negative, and the

preferences reverse: the diluted power of the Ten is preferable to the concentrated Ace. The latter card, the most negative, deserves to be lowest in those negative suits.

The Decad (Ten) is important to Pythagoreans. It is the basis of our arithmetical system: ten digits efficiently express sequences, hierarchies, quantities, calculations, and equations. Also important is the number Four, which could account for the foursome of ancestral suit-signs hypothesized here. Four was said to “contain” Ten ($4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10$). Number symbolism could go far in explaining the structure and meaning of the 4-suit card deck.

The Hermetic symbolism of numeral cards (combining both Pythagorean and astrological symbolism) must have begun with the earliest 4-suit pack (from the Harranian Sabians, I trust). The concept of reverse ranking traveled west and east. In the Mogul pack, four suits ascend, and four descend. In the *Dasavatara* pack, five suits ascend, and five descend. In the *Ramayana* pack, six suits ascend, and six descend.

Now we can appreciate that the symbolism of the Mogul deck is completely coherent, having an appropriate combination of astrology in the suit-signs and Pythagoreanism in the ranking of numerals. If we look back to the planetary powers and their traits in mythology, we see a symmetry comparable to that in the Mameluke and Italian cards: four of the Mogul suits can be classed as “good” and four of them as “bad.” In the good suits, the numeral cards rank from Ace high to Ten low, while in the bad suits, the numeral cards reverse in value.

Positive Suits	Negative Suits
Gold Coins for Sun	Slaves for Saturn (misanthropic)
Harps for Venus	Crowns for Jupiter (congenial but unfaithful)
Documents for Mercury	Swords for Mars (bellicose)
Bolsters for Fortune	Silver Coins for Moon (seemingly erratic and inconstant)

The Money Cards of China apparently did not employ astrological correspondences or any related symmetry. However, they did preserve an instance of the prototypical “reverse rankings.” Reportedly, when four players used the 4-suit Money Cards, the numerals of the Coins suit ranked downward from the Ace, while the other three suits (Strings of Coins, Myriads of Strings, Tens of Myriads) followed the more intuitive order.²⁵

Esoteric symbolism seems to have been intended in common cards, those that I hypothesize for the Sabians and those that survive from the Mamelukes, as well as the Mogul cards still used in India. Similar esoterism may have been consciously transferred to the common cards of Europe. This esoterism may have prompted the trumps’ symbolism, something that we will begin to see in the next chapter.

3

Tarot Trumps in Italy



HYBRID COURTS-TRUMPS

The Tarot was not the first card deck to include trumps. A pioneering example was conceived in the Milanese court.¹ Filippo Maria Visconti (1392–1447) became the third duke of Milan in 1412. He was the younger half-brother of Valentina Visconti, mentioned in the previous chapter. He too enjoyed card play. He is known to have contemplated an idea for an original deck. The cards were rendered by a noted Milanese illuminator, Michelino da Besozzo (died ca. 1450). He was absent from Milan in the years 1410 to 1417 or '18. He would have undertaken the card project sometime thereafter. He followed instructions by Marziano da Tortona.

Marziano, born in about 1370, belonged to the Rampini family, prominent in Tortona.² Marziano studied in Pavia, Padua, Bologna, and Florence. He was a secretary in the papal curia under Pope Gregory XII. Marziano was hired as young Filippo's tutor in humanist literature and later served as Filippo's secretary. Marziano was adept at astrology, another of Filippo's interests. Marziano, for his part in producing the duke's card game, reportedly received the astounding sum of 1,500 gold pieces (surely an exaggeration). The report comes from the duke's biographer, the humanist Pier Candido Decembrio (1399–1477). Gasparino Barzizza, a noted professor, delivered an oration at Marziano's funeral (the eulogy has been translated).³

Marziano apparently completed his card project before he died (ca. 1425). The cards have not survived, but Marziano had written a description of them and a few aspects of the new game. Fortunately, a 1449 copy of this treatise is conserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Lat. 8745A).⁴ Marziano allows ambiguities in his Latin text. His exposition can be more clearly presented in a chart. The deck was divided into four suits, each with its own suit-sign (a bird), symbolizing Virtues, Riches, Virginities, Pleasures. Each suit had a King and numeral cards. The quantity of numerals is not specified. Franco Pratesi suggests seven in each suit.

Virtues	Riches	Virginities	Pleasures
1) Jupiter	2) Juno	3) Pallas	4) Venus
5) Apollo	6) Neptune	7) Diana	8) Bacchus
9) Mercury	10) Mars	11) Vesta	12) Ceres
13) Hercules	14) Aeolus	15) Daphne	16) Cupid
King of Eagles	King of Phoenixes	King of Turtledoves	King of Doves
Seven (?) of Eagles	Ace of Phoenixes	Seven (?) of Turtledoves	Ace of Doves
↓	↓	↓	↓
Ace of Eagles	Seven (?) of Phoenixes	Ace of Turtledoves	Seven (?) of Doves

Two of the suits in this deck derive their signs from their highest deities. The eagle belonged to Jupiter, the dove to Venus. However, the usual bird of Pallas was the *owl*, while Juno owned the *peacock*. (In fact, Marziano, in his description of Juno, mentions her “damnable bird, adorned with eyed feathers,” properties more typical of a peacock. Perhaps the phoenix and the peacock have been confusingly equated. (We don’t know exactly what Michelino envisioned when he rendered the cards.) The fifteenth century was only beginning its acquaintance with the art of ancient Greece and Rome. Among the numerals of the suit cards, two sequences increase in value while the other two decrease. This counterpoise doubtless derives from the Mameluke practice. Here, however, it does not entail the Pythagorean interpretation (see [chapter 2](#)). In this case, the suits of Virtues and Virginities are good, and greater

quantities of suit-signs are desirable. The suits of Riches and Pleasures (materialistic and hedonistic) are bad, and lesser quantities of suit-signs are desirable.

Each King outranks the numeral cards in his suit, but he is outranked by four of the deities. Jupiter, Juno, Pallas, and Venus beat all the other cards in their respective suits. We could say that the gods and goddesses serve as “super court cards.”

The deities also act somewhat like trumps (a term that did not yet exist in Marziano’s lifetime). His lack of terminology has caused confusion. In my chart, the Arabic numerals show the order in which Marziano presents the deities in his tract. He is explicit about the numeration. It implies that Venus, while beating all the cards in her suit of Pleasures, will herself be beaten by Pallas, Juno, and Jupiter. Jupiter beats all. Cupid beats the King and all the numerals in the suit of Pleasures but is the lowest in the “divine” set.

Marziano’s most troublesome passage says, “*Sed inter se dii hac lege tenebuntur: quod qui prior inferius annotabitur, sequentibus omnibus praesit.*” Card historians have oddly struggled with a coherent translation. I propose the following solution: “But the gods, among themselves [in the divine set], must keep this rule: whichever [divinity], as previously established, is denoted lower [in the divine set] will prevail over all those following.” I think Marziano simply means that, among the Arabic numerals as given in my chart, the lower beat the higher. This may seem peculiar to most card players nowadays, but it would not worry those who were familiar with reverse ranking among the numeral cards. This gives preeminence to Jupiter, king of the gods, who is followed by a sensible sequence. It proceeds with his wife Juno and then Pallas (his most ethereal child, generated from his brain), etc.

MILAN OR FERRARA?

I formerly supposed that the familiar Tarot trumps arose early in the reign of Filippo Visconti, not long after he and Marziano invented the hybrid

courts-trumps. An important correction arises from a remarkable discovery by Ross Caldwell.⁵

On 1 January 1441, the court of Ferrara rendered payment to a certain artist, Jacopo Sagramoro. He painted fourteen figures on rag paper (the Italian word is *bombaxo*, indicating cotton content). The figures were to be used at an evening party honoring a young Milanese visitor, Duke Filippo's only child, Bianca Maria (1425–1468). For citizens of Renaissance Italy, January 1 was not the start of a new year. However, the day was the Feast of the Circumcision and was celebrated with parties and games. The significant fourteen figures were probably specialized playing cards, which, apparently, the Ferrarese court did not have on hand. Sagramoro, whom we know from other records to have been a painter of cards, had to be specially commissioned to supply the items that were lacking. Surely the game required more than fourteen cards. I assume that they were added to a deck having four suits. We may have here the exact date for the earliest presence of the Tarot trumps in Ferrara. This implies that the first Tarot had fourteen trumps.

In my opinion, the contest for the first Tarot involves Milan vs. Ferrara. That is ironic, for Bianca was a Milanese princess, entertained at the Ferrarese court. I surmise that the request for the fourteen figures came from Bianca. Inasmuch as her father, Duke Filippo, was involved in inventing the concept of trump cards, I think that the Visconti court in Milan is the more likely birthplace of the Tarot. The invention could not have been much before 1441; otherwise the game would have found its way to Ferrara before Bianca's visit.

The clerk who recorded Sagramoro's payment in 1441 had no special term for the "14 figures." However, a Ferrarese record for 10 February 1442 shows that the court again paid Sagramoro for the painting of cards, now specifically called *trionfi*.⁶

The quantity of Sagramoro's cards during Bianca Visconti's visit suggests a symmetry with the size of the familiar suits, that is, 14 cards: 10 numerals, 3 male courts, and a Queen. The standard Italian deck, following the Mameluke pattern, had no female figures. But we know that the Italians sometimes did use idiosyncratic decks in which the Queen appeared as one of the court ranks.

A Ferrarese record from 1457 cites a payment to Gherardo d'Ancona da Vicenza for two packs of *carte grande da trionfi* with 70 cards in each pack.⁷ By my hypothesis, a pack of 70 would consist of the presumed 14 trumps, plus 4 suits, each with 14 cards. On the Internet, this form is currently discussed as the “5 x 14” Tarot. That label is convenient but could be slightly misleading. The quantity entails not 5 suits, but 4 suits (having suit-signs) and a set of trumps (lacking suit-signs). I long ago voiced the possibility of 14 trumps in the early Tarot.⁸

What subjects occupied that set of trumps? In my case, plausible suggestions are limited by my belief in the primacy of the *Tarot de Marseille*. I must try to envision a 14-trump Tarot that could have evolved naturally into the “Marseilles” version. After much consideration, I have arrived at the simple supposition that the 14-trump Tarot possessed the lower trumps, numbered from One through Fourteen (I-XIV) as we find them in the “French” order.

I hypothesize that a final stage completed the trump sequence as we now know it and probably included the Fool (XXII or 0 or unnumbered). Possibly, however, the Fool was added in a separate development. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the order and imagery of the *Tarot de Marseille* appear to be carefully organized and not the result of casual increments.

The Cary Collection, housed in the Beinecke Library at Yale, has an illuminated Tarot of rather small dimensions (14 x 7.8 cm). Although now incomplete, it must exemplify the Tarot after it gained its higher allegories. Among other trumps here, we find the Star, Moon, Sun, World.⁹ Surely this deck once had the full complement of 21 trumps. The Fool is unmistakably present. The deck has been called the “d’Este-Anjou Tarot,” but this is a misnomer. Some of the court figures are shown carrying heraldic shields. These identify two ruling families, the d’Este of Ferrara and the house of Aragon (who had wrested the kingdom of Naples away from René of Anjou). The Ferrarese rulers and the new rulers of Naples were allied by the 1473 marriage of Ercole d’Este and Eleanora d’Aragona. This is almost certainly the union indicated by the heraldry in the Estense-Aragonese Tarot in the Cary Collection. So, assuredly, the Tarot had already evolved by that date.

THE *TAROT DE MARSEILLE* DECLARED MILANESE

The Milanese origin of the so-called *Tarot de Marseille* is evident to me as a student of art history: I will refer primarily to the history of costume and to the specialized symbolism of heraldry.

In 1973, Fred Gettings, whose training in art history is obvious from his writings, said that the *Tarot de Marseille* “is well over 250 years old, and was printed in France, but was almost certainly of much earlier Italian origin.”¹⁰ He was deeply interested in occultism and divination and therefore was ignored by the card historians of the 1970s. In the *Tarot de Marseille*, the trump figures wear costumes that are mostly in early Renaissance style (belted jerkins, tights, robes, high-waisted gowns). The Italian Renaissance is the likely progenitor, because more northerly fashions (as from Germany, the Lowlands, or France) are lacking from the deck: its gentlemen do not wear straight, pointed shoes; its ladies do not wear straight, pointed headdresses.

In the Ace of Swords in the *Tarot de Marseille*, the blade is encircled with a crown that is draped with two fronds, palm and laurel, symbolizing spiritual and material victory (figure 2.4). The ancient Romans bestowed fronds of palm and laurel on generals in their triumphal processions. Ancient sculptures of Victory sometimes hold both the palm frond and the laurel wreath. Christian Rome later adopted the palm as a symbol of victory over death: Christian artists often depict martyrs as carrying the palm branch. The Viscontis adopted the motif of crown-and-fronds as a heraldic device. This, as clearly as an outright signature, identifies the deck’s patrons as the Viscontis or their successors, the Visconti-Sforzas. The latter dynasty arose when Bianca Visconti married her father’s most powerful general, Francesco Sforza.

One of the Viscontis, such as Bianca Visconti-Sforza, probably commissioned the so-called *Tarot de Marseille* or, more strictly said, its prototype. That would have been a painted Tarot. Then lesser noblemen, or perhaps the rising middle class, created a demand for similar decks more cheaply produced by woodcuts and stencils.

This Visconti-Sforza deck apparently traveled to France in the early 1500s, if not earlier. French card makers printed their own Tarots, adding

French inscriptions on all the figure cards (except for Death, presumably too horrible to be named). The city of Marseilles became a long-time center for card manufacturing, and the imported Tarot of the Visconti-Sforza type became known as the *Tarot de Marseille*.

THE STEELE SERMON

“Steele Sermon” refers to a written discourse more properly titled *De Ludo* (*On Gaming*), written mostly in Latin and occupying a few pages in an ample manuscript. It contains a small drawing showing the profile of a hooded monk, probably the owner. He was a Franciscan, devoting one of his sermons to the stigmata of St. Francis. I have scrutinized all the pages to find watermarks, the translucent trademarks that the manufacturers have pressed into their handmade paper.¹¹ Antique watermarks have been researched and cataloged.¹² The monk’s manuscript possesses watermarks that place it in the vicinity of Venice in about 1500. The volume was acquired by Robert Reynolds Steele (1860–1944), a British librarian, editor, and antiquarian. His is the name now attached to the sermon. He published a type-set transcript of the monk’s sermon about cards.¹³ The United States Playing Card Company acquired the manuscript.¹⁴

Thierry Depaulis has greatly extended the context of this artifact.¹⁵ The story begins with St. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444), a Franciscan preacher. He was puritanical and incited gamblers to toss their frivolous games into public bonfires. St. Bernardino’s obsessions passed to a Franciscan disciple, Domenico Gangale (1393–1476). He became better known as Giacomo della Marcha or James of the Marches. He too was canonized, long after his death. Thierry Depaulis, with his usual diligence, has located one of St. James’s later sermons, *De Ludo*, which is clearly the model for the *De Ludo* by our anonymous monk. That Franciscan represents yet a third generation opposed to cards. He embroiders St. James’s denunciation of playing cards. St. James tells of a certain imp named Açarus (“Azarus” in the later version). The imp persuaded Lucifer that they could institute gambling as a means of luring Christians away from their faith. The devils intended that gambling should assume the

importance of a religion, with churches replaced by taverns, priests by innkeepers, relics by dice, and icons by cards.

The author of the Steele Sermon adds a few comments about Tarot cards (*triumphi*) and provides the oldest known list of the trumps. They are numbered in the order associated with the city of Ferrara. I will list them with translations of their names. Following the conclusion of the list, I will translate the monk's parenthetical asides for trumps 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 21, and the Fool.

- 1st: *El bagatella* (Bagatella) (*et est omnium inferior*)
- 2nd: *Imperatrix* (Empress)
- 3rd: *Imperator* (Emperor)
- 4th: *La papessa* (Popess) (*O miseri quod negat Christiana fides*)
- 5th: *El papa* (Pope) (*qui debet omni sanctitate polere et isti ribaldi faciunt ipsorum capitaneum. O Pontifex cur, etc.*)
- 6th: *La temperentia* [*temperantia*] (Temperance)
- 7th: *L'amore* (Love)
- 8th: *Lo caro triumphale* (Triumphal Car) (*vel mundus parvus*)
- 9th: *La fortezza* (Fortitude)
- 10th: *La rotta* (Wheel) (*id est regno, regnavi, sum sine regno*)
- 11th: *El gobbo* (Hunchback)
- 12th: *Lo impichato* (Hanged Man)
- 13th: *La morte* (Death)
- 14th: *El diavolo* (Devil)
- 15th: *La sagitta* (Arrow) [perhaps intending *La saetta* (Lightning)]
- 16th: *La stella* (Star)
- 17th: *La luna* (Moon)
- 18th: *El sole* (Sun)
- 19th: *Lo angelo* (Angel) [meaning the Angel of the Last Judgment]
- 20th: *La justicia* (Justice)
- 21st: *El mōdo* [*mondo*] (World) (*cioe Dio Padre*)
El matto (Madman) *sie nulla (nisi velint)*

The monk says of the Juggler, “And he is inferior to all.” This refers to the low status of the card in the trump hierarchy. The Juggler’s name here is *El bagatella*. Compare our modern “bagatelle,” a trifle.

Of the Popess, the monk writes, “Oh wretches, the Christian faith denies this.” The monk was of course offended by the prospect of a female pope. He may have viewed the Popess as Pope Joan. According to an anti-papal fiction, she masqueraded as a man and ascended to the papacy but was unmasked when she gave birth (during a public procession, no less). However, Pope Joan is typically represented with her baby, an attribute not found with any Tarot Popess in the Renaissance. I doubt that the Tarot Popess has any connection with Pope Joan.

The monk laments the degradation of the pope, “who ought to prevail as the holiest of all and yet these debauchees make captain over themselves.” I don’t see that the pope has been made a captain of any kind. His card is neither the first nor the highest in the trump hierarchy. The monk’s further note (“Oh Pontifex why, etc.”) could be the preacher’s reminder to himself: during a spoken sermon, he would have explained his view of the pope’s disparagement in the game.

For the Car, we have the alternative of the “little world.” I think that the Franciscan critic of the trumps has unwittingly preserved a clue about their esoteric meanings. Ancient philosophers believed that the macrocosm (“large world,” the universe) and the microcosm (“little world,” the individual) are organized along comparable lines. For instance, the universe (“one turning”) is eternally in motion; the individual (“indivisible” self) is similarly subject to cycles, the cycles of time. The physical universe and the physical human are comparable in that they consist of the same elements. Also, according to pre-Christian belief, both the universe and the human have a body and a soul. Stoics and Hermetists used these parallels to defend more specific “sympathies,” which became the bases for occult “correspondences.” We saw planetary correspondences in Sabian temples ([chapter 2](#)) and will see more in magic rituals ([chapter 6](#)).

The Wheel is certainly the Wheel of Fortune. The monk adds standard recitations: “I reign; I have reigned; I am without reign.” Painters often depicted Fortune with her victims. As the latter scrambled around her wheel, they spouted those recitations (inscribed near the figures’ mouths).

Usually, a fourth participant aspired upwards and said, “I will reign.”¹⁶ The entire formula appears in Bonifacio Bembo’s Wheel card in the Pierpont Morgan Library.¹⁷

The World in the monk’s list is named alternatively as “God the Father.” Robert Place identifies the World card as the World Soul.¹⁸ I agree, and I can explain why the World Soul might materialize as a patriarchal deity. In mystical Platonism, this World Soul is sometimes identified as Jupiter. An easy equivalence would allow Jupiter, the pagan father of the world, to become Jehovah, the Judeo-Christian father of the world. This may seem blasphemous to modern Christians but was not always so in earlier periods. The Roman poet Ovid called Jupiter “the god of faith,” and later, when the Roman Empire became predominantly Christian, astrologers imagined that Jupiter was the planetary deity who patronized the new faith. In medieval art, Jupiter is often dressed like a Christian priest or monk.¹⁹ Medieval authors are even more helpful. Petrarch writes a speech for Jupiter in which the pagan god becomes enthusiastic about his plan to come to earth as a man. He has already chosen an attractive virgin who will bear his infant incarnation.²⁰ Dante allows that Jove (Jupiter) can be crucified.²¹ Later I will explain how the World Soul/Jupiter can appear as the goddess of Fortune, as I identified her in the World card of the *Tarot de Marseille* and other decks.

The Fool is a “Madman” in the monk’s list. He specifies that this card ranks as nothing in the game unless the players wish otherwise. (The Fool has no power to win a trick but optionally may be given a high point value when players compute their scores.)

THE TRUMP ORDER

In the 1500s, different trump orders emerged across north Italy. In the following lists, I have dubbed each trump with the name used in most English-language commentaries. The *Tarot de Marseille* is now denoted as *T de M*. While I believe that it originated in Milan, I do not have any impressively early decks to prove my point. However, we do have a trump list from Pavia, the city in Lombardy where the Visconti dukes maintained

an auxiliary court. In contrasting the following trump orders, we find that they differ increasingly as we travel south from Milan.

<i>T de M</i>	Pavia	Ferrara	Bologna	Florence
World	World	World	Judgment	Judgment
Judgment	Judgment	Justice	World	World
Sun	Sun	Judgment	Sun	Sun
Moon	Moon	Sun	Moon	Moon
Star	Star	Moon	Star	Star
Tower	Tower	Star	Tower	Tower
Devil	Devil	Tower	Devil	Devil
Temperance	Temperance	Devil	Death	Death
Death	Death	Death	Hanged Man	Hanged Man
Hanged Man	Hanged Man	Hanged Man	Hermit	Hermit
Fortitude	Hermit	Hermit	Wheel	Wheel
Wheel	Wheel	Wheel	Fortitude	Chariot
Hermit	Fortitude	Fortitude	Justice	Fortitude
Justice	Chariot	Love	Temperance	Justice
Chariot	Justice	Chariot	Chariot	Temperance
Love	Love	Temperance	Love	Love
Pope	Pope	Pope	Moor*	Pope
Emperor	Emperor	Emperor	Moor	Emperor
Empress	Popess	Popess	Moor	Empress
Popess	Empress	Empress	Moor	Popess
Juggler	Juggler	Juggler	Juggler	Juggler

* In the Bolognese Tarot, the two papal types and the two imperial types became known as *Papi*. Their order is uncertain. In 1725, the Papal Legate insisted on the removal of the *Papi*. Card makers substituted Satraps or Moors. They rank as equals in the game. (When more than one is played to a trick, the Moor last played will beat the Moor previously played. The *Papi* were used in the same way.)

In analyzing the above lists, Michael Dummett has noted the essential role played by the Virtues. When we withdraw those cards from the trump

hierarchies, the local variations are not so wildly different. So the question becomes, “Where do the Virtues Go?” This is the title of a 2004 article by Dummett.²² I reply, “The Virtues belong where you find them in the *T de M*.” Most casual viewers, such as game players having no interest in deep symbolism, would find little justification in my statement. They would say that the *T de M* is a mess, best rejected. According to my reasoning, the gamesters south of Milan forsook or gladly forgot the original trump order (that still found in the *T de M*, in my opinion). In Ferrara, the Justice card was associated with adjudication and thus was raised above the Angel of the Last Judgment. Bolognese and Florentine players must have given up struggling with the placement of the Virtues and merely grouped them together, while disagreeing slightly on where to interject the group.

A converse argument also promotes the primacy of the *T de M*. The various orders for the trumps were something of a mystery to Tarot players everywhere. The *T de M* would have been the most mysterious of all. Tarot players may have wished to improve on the trump orders in Ferrara, Bologna, and Florence. But would anyone with that intention produce the bewildering order in the *T de M*? No. The prototype for the *T de M* came first, and the other orders were feeble efforts to improve it without understanding it.

NUMBERING THE TRUMPS

The *order* of the trumps is different from the *numbering* of the trumps. In all the orders, the Juggler comes first. However, that card was regarded as trump number One in Pavia and Ferrara but was unnumbered in Bologna and Florence. In the latter pair of cities, number One must have gone to the next trump in line. On this basis, consult the previous chart and number the cards from bottom to top. You will see that Death receives number Thirteen in all columns. The unanimity would seem to indicate a deliberate effort. Thirteen’s association with bad luck must have been strong. Other trumps possibly had strong associations that the card players wanted to keep, not because of a deep symbolism but because of a convenience in remembering the trumps’ ranks. For instance, the Wheel is

reliably number Ten. Mathematicians described ten as “circular” or “recurrent,” for however the number might be multiplied, its terminal cypher (zero) keeps coming back. “Circularity” can evoke the image of a wheel. But exoteric explanations of individual trump numbers are tentative, because we know so little about the attitudes of the first Tarot players.

In [chapter 5](#), I will show how nicely the *T de M* accommodates esoteric number symbolism. While those trumps in Florence have some commonality with their *order* in the *T de M*, the Florentine *numbers* are correct only for the Wheel, the Hanged Man, and Death.

In the Tarot of Florence, the Wheel lost its nicely “circular” number after 1500, when Florentine card makers developed their deck into the *Minchiate*. In that deck, the Popess and Pope became one figure, eventually called the Grand Duke; Empress and Emperor became Emperor of the West and Emperor of the East; the Angel of Judgment became the Angel of Fame. Even more extraordinarily, the *Minchiate* included cards for each of the twelve zodiacal signs, the four elements, and the Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity), as well as Prudence (a Virtue holding a mirror for reflectivity and a snake for subtlety). In all, a *Minchiate* has 40 trumps plus the Fool. In this deck, the top five trumps are unnumbered; the rest are numbered (with Roman numerals)—a sensible practice, given such an abundance of disparate items.

INVECTIVES

The Tarot survived among card players, and their traditionalism kept the imagery intact. But they knew nothing of secret symbolism. As I said, they were annoyed at the presumed nonsense.

Francesco Berni in 1526 wrote *Capitolo del Gioco della Primiera*, a manual on a card game, that is, *Primiera*. He ridicules the *Tarocco* player, distracted by all the pictures and encumbered by the many cards in his hand. He resorts to arranging them out of sight beneath the table.²³ Berni advises:

Whoever is entertained by *Tarocco*, let him note that the only signification of this word *Tarocco* is stupid, foolish, simple, fit only for use by bakers, cobblers, and the vulgar, to play—at most for the fourth part of a *carlino* [small coin]—at *Tarocco* or *Triumph* or any sort of *Sminchiate* [Minchiate], which in every way signifies only nonsense and idleness, or for use, as by children, to feast the eyes on the sun, the moon, and the twelve [zodiacal signs].

Still more judgmental is the verse diatribe by Flavio Alberti Lollo, a Ferrarese player of Tarot. In his *Invettiva contra il Giuoco del Taroco* (*Invective against the Game of Tarot*, Venice, 1550), he comically complains about the deck's nonsensical images. Lollo condemns its inventor.²⁴

<i>Che vuol dir altro il Bagatella, e'l Matto</i>	What do the Juggler and the Fool report
<i>Se non ch'ei fusse vn ciurmatore, e vn barro?</i>	Except he was a fraud and cheat?
<i>Che significar altro la Papessa,</i>	What more say they—Popess and Car,
<i>Il Carro, il Traditor, la Ruota, il Gobbo;</i>	The Traitor, Wheel, and Hermit sort,
<i>La Fortezza, la Stella, il Sol, la Luna,</i>	Along with Fortitude, the Star,
<i>E la Morte, e l'Inferno; e tutto il resto</i>	Sun, Moon, Death, Hell, and all—replete
<i>Di questa bizaria girando l'esca...</i>	With weirdness, in a dizzy sport?

TRIOMPHO DI FORTUNA

In the very year when Berni was deriding the Tarot, another Italian seemed to be celebrating its mystique. Sigismondo Fanti was born in Ferrara but made his career in Venice, where he published books. He issued a fortunetelling manual, *Triumpho di Fortuna* (*Triumph of Fortune*, Venice, 1526), featuring not cards but dice. Within his book are woodcut diagrams consisting of wheels with spokes that frame arrays of dots, derived from the faces of dice. Accompanying the wheels are historical and allegorical figures, including the Cardinal Virtues and the planetary deities. Rhyming stanzas, illustrated by primitive vignettes, convey the answers to the reader's questions.

The book has a title page with a woodcut that is worth our attention ([figure 3.1](#)). It bears the initials IM, referring to the printmaker, who is otherwise not identified. One authority says that Christchurch, Oxford, conserves a preparatory drawing, attributed to Baldassare Peruzzi (1481–1536), a renowned artist from Siena.²⁵ The title page is allegorical and mystical. Standing in the foreground is a nude youth holding a cube (an oversize die with dots marking the three visible sides). Kneeling at his feet is a bearded astrologer holding calipers and an astrolabe. In the context of a fortunetelling book, I would guess that the custodian of the die represents Randomness, while the stargazer represents Predestination. Beyond these men, the scene is divided between a cityscape and, above it, an assembly of personified powers. A papal figure sits between two women, *Virtus* (Virtue) on his right and *Voluptas* (Pleasure) on his left. The trio thus recalls both the Pope card and the Love card in the *T de M*.²⁶ Fanti's trio perches on a celestial globe that also has a dual association, with the World and with the Wheel. The latter is emphasized by the globe's axis, which is horizontal and ends in two crank handles. One is grasped by an angel (cf. trump 20) but the other by a devil (cf. trump 15). The whole apparatus is supported by an Atlas figure. Fanti's group of allegories is surrounded by turbulent clouds. Below them, we see the cityscape, consisting of masonry buildings, including Rome's Pantheon. The most prominent structure is a towering gate (cf. the Tower) with an enormous clock having a center like a sun disk (cf. the Sun). In front of the

tower stands a smaller gate. In front of that, a stairway leads down to a waterway. There, two men row a boat, while another figure rows his boat closer to the horizon. For a recent interpretation of the print, consult Robert Place.²⁷



Figure 3.1. Trump types, woodcut. (Title page from Sigismondo Fanti, *Triumpho di Fortuna*, Venice, 1526.)

Does Fanti's title page make deliberate allusions to the Tarot? The blending of the imagery is unusual. It almost appears to be a surreptitious use of the Tarot types, arranged so that they would be satisfying to viewers who were "in the know." But who, in 1526, was still "in the know" about

an esoteric interpretation of the Tarot? Did the trumps, as secret “hieroglyphs,” endure in a secret society? It seems extremely doubtful.

A skeptic could say that Fanti’s print coordinates with the Tarot only because both symbolize universal powers and both use stock imagery from Renaissance art. However, this explanation is not really adequate. Even if Fanti’s illustrator only resorted to standard iconography, quite apart from the Tarot, his title page has significance for Tarotists. He surely intended by his choice of imagery to alert the reader to a special book, namely a manual for telling the future. We are entitled to suppose that the same imagery in the Tarot would have had the same aura—that of a card deck for telling the future.

CARDS AS LOTS

Teofilo Folengo (1491–1544) was a Mantuan author who wrote burlesque verse in a mixture of Latin, Italian, and a Mantuan dialect. In the fictional narrative of his *Caos del Triperuno* (Venice, 1527), the relevant episode begins with a party attended by the protagonist Triperuno (meaning “Three-for-one,” whatever that means) and his friend Limerno.²⁸ The latter is a poet whose queen commands that he compose some original verses. Two men and two women lead him to a room where the Tarot trumps and the Fool card have been laid out in four groups. The cards are termed *sorte*, “lots.” Limerno is required to use the groups of cards as inspirations for four individualized sonnets, one for each of his guides. He complies. He incorporates the names of the given trumps in his verses, which allude to qualities of the four individuals. He adds a fifth sonnet that refers to all 22 Tarot allegories.

Are we entitled to use Folengo’s fiction as evidence of a general practice? His attitude is not serious. His “lots” seem to be literary devices, not necessarily known in everyday life. His sonnets are not oriented toward the future. Folengo does not reveal the layout for the cards. He does not employ the suit cards. Limerno is not presented as a professional card reader. On the other hand, Folengo sometimes wrote under the pseudonym of “Merlin,” which evokes the memory of King Arthur’s court

magician. Folengo casually refers to playing cards as “lots,” a term associated with divination.

Girolamo Bargagli (1537–1586) was a Sienese academician and author. His *Dialogo de Giuochi* (*Discussion of Games*, Siena, 1572) comes at a rather late date for our purposes. Yet he may have preserved an idea from an earlier era. In his *Discussion*, he says:²⁹

I have also seen played the game of *Tarocchi*, and each participant was given the name of a card. And then the reasons were stated aloud as to why the participant had been assigned such a *Tarocco* card.

I am not clear how the assignment of the card was made. Each player would have calculated his score by reviewing the cards that he captured in the course of the game. At that juncture, perhaps, the trumps in hand were interpreted as symbols of the players’ character traits.

I have begun to build a case for the trumps as “hieroglyphs,” with meanings that were kept secret. Maybe the optional use of those hieroglyphs was also kept secret. It could have eluded public exposure until a late date—when the original esoterica had been forgotten, with traces surviving only because of their entertainment value.

My interpretations of the Tarot’s “hieroglyphs” will take us deep into Pythagorean mysticism, talismanic magic, and astrological functions called “lots.” Also, I have interpreted the Juggler as a Genius figure, one who dispenses lots. What a clever conceit if his entire card should itself be the first in a sequence of 22 lots! In these circumstances, a Renaissance use of a divinatory Tarot becomes plausible, even probable. However, our current evidence seems to emphasize divination as character analysis, rather than explicit future-telling. For cartomancy, properly so called, we must wait until our survey reaches the 1700s.

Part Two



The Texts Applied to the Trumps

Hidden Hieroglyphs



HORAPOLLO NILIACUS

In the first chapter, I briefly mentioned the *Hieroglyphica*. It encouraged fifteenth-century Egyptomania. That dictionary at that time surely would have been a primary reference for anyone hoping to compose Tarot trumps as creative “hieroglyphs.”

The name “Horapollo” honors two solar gods, Horus (Egyptian) and Apollo (Greek and Roman). Such hybrid names were typical in Greco-Roman Egypt. In the current survey, the name Horapollo applies to two Egyptians, Horapollo of Phenebythis and his grandson.

Horapollo *the elder* was a traveler, grammarian, and author. Photius (ca. 810–893) credits this Horapollo with writing plays and a history of Alexandria. According to the biographer Suidas (fl. 900s), Horapollo wrote *Temenica*, which dealt with sacred places, and he wrote commentaries on Homer, Alcaeus, and Sophocles.

Horapollo’s two sons, Asclepiades and Heraiscus, became teachers and probably were priests by hereditary right. They became tireless investigators of their Egyptian heritage. Heraiscus addressed one of his books to Proclus (ca. 410–85), the last Neoplatonist of note. Proclus said that his wisdom was inferior to that of Heraiscus. Heraiscus or Asclepiades taught Isidorus of Alexandria (fl. 500), who also took his turn as head of the Platonic Academy at Athens. His friend, follower, and biographer was Damascius, the last to head the Academy. Damascius was

ousted in 529 when the Emperor Justinian, famous patron of Christianity, closed all the pagan schools in the empire. Damascius says that Heraiscus “made his soul to dwell always in sanctuaries and mystic places, and fostered not only the ancestral rites of Egypt, but also those of other lands, whenever he could find any remnants of them.”¹ Asclepiades may have exceeded his brother in preserving the old Egyptian culture. Asclepiades compiled its history, pored over the theological texts, systematically compared them with other religions, and wrote his own hymns to the gods. No one at this date is likely to have understood hieroglyphic literature, so Asclepiades’s efforts probably depended heavily on the Hermetic writings. They were written in Greek but falsely advertised themselves as translations from hieroglyphics.

For an effort to translate Egyptian script, we turn to the *Hieroglyphica*, a book attributed to Horapollo the younger, whom I take to be Asclepiades’s son. This Horapollo must have benefited from the reputation and resources of his family. He too seems to have been eclectic in his interests. He probably made the usual circuit between Alexandria and Athens. Reportedly, he converted to Christianity. The dates of his life cannot have been much different from those of Isidorus. Opinions differ radically. Jean Seznec places Horapollo in “the second or fourth century.”² But others say the fourth century,³ or not long after the fourth century.⁴ I suggest the late fifth century, at least. Horapollo is not mentioned by Roman authors with related interests: the historian Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330–ca. 395), the grammarian Servius (early 400s), the social commentator Macrobius (fl. 430).

My struggle to identify Horapollo may be beside the point. Was he indeed the author of the book that interests us? Suidas, that Greek biographer of the tenth century, mentions Horapollo but does not cite him as an author on hieroglyphics. We know of no copy of the *Hieroglyphica* prior to that discovered ca. 1420 (see further below). No earlier author ever refers to the book. This all suggests that the *Hieroglyphica* dates only from the late 1300s. However, a few scholars of the Greek language have examined the text and have detected hints of the fifth century.⁵ As we are about to see, the book certainly has authentic information about hieroglyphs, and that would suggest a date in the 300s, not in the 1300s.

Also, the author has a knowledge of pre-Christian Egypt. For instance, he explains that baboons were deemed sacred to Thoth, and the early priesthood permitted them to live in his temple “as they do today.” Those words could only have been addressed to readers of a remote date, before Egypt’s conversion to Christianity. Now we are catapulted back to a time possibly prior to Horapollo himself! I would guess that the *Hieroglyphica* accumulated by stages through several centuries or was compiled from sources that spanned several centuries. If so, perhaps the transmission involved a real Horapollo, but one who has been lost to history. The *Hieroglyphica* clearly deserves further attention from specialists. For my current theory, I only need to know that (1) the book arrived in Italy in time to help inspire the Tarot, and (2) the book contains symbolism applicable to the Tarot. These points are secure and warrant a closer inspection of the text.

THE CONTENT OF THE *HIEROGLYPHICA*

The *Hieroglyphica* offers no close connection with Hermetism or Platonism, nor with any philosophy of language or theory of symbolism. We learn nothing about constructing statements with hieroglyphs. The text does not recount what Ammianus knew—that hieroglyphs were both ideograms and phonetic signs. The *Hieroglyphica* begins with a section naming seventy different subjects and their corresponding hieroglyphs. When the Egyptians want to indicate a mother, they draw a vulture, because the vulture supposedly exists only in the female gender.⁶ I suspect an association with Egyptian mother goddesses to whom the vulture was sacred. In any case, all of this neglects the ultimate etymology: the Egyptian word for “vulture” has the same sound as the Egyptian word for “mother.”

Our author was unduly attracted to mythic explanations for hieroglyphs. He says that the symbol for “son” is a goose because this creature is excessively fond of its offspring and will sacrifice itself to hunters in order to lure them away from the goslings. (Even if this instance of goose behavior is *not* a myth, the behavior is scarcely relevant.

Aren't some of the goslings female? Why is the hieroglyph limited to sonship?) In fact, the Egyptian word for "goose" has the same sound as the Egyptian word for "son." This is another homonym like the phonetic value of the hieroglyph for mother/vulture.⁷ When we ignore the mythic trappings, the basic interpretations in the *Hieroglyphica* sometimes stand forth as correct readings.

The *Hieroglyphica* displays a general fondness for animal forms. This suggests that the author worked from a bestiary, a collection of popular notions and parables about the behavior and appearance of various creatures. Lynn Thorndike has a helpful discussion of literary parallels for these animals.⁸ The compiler of the hieroglyphs apparently located a minimal glossary for them but then combined them with excerpts from Greek bestiaries where the imagery seemed compatible to him. Maybe he was trying to show the universality of certain images. If so, he forced the issue and spoiled the credibility of his work.

A second section of the *Hieroglyphica* adds 119 more signs. They appear to have been compiled independently of the first section. The additions make even greater use of the bestiaries. Still worse, the *Hieroglyphica* here apparently used the bestiaries in order to invent new signs not known among the Egyptians. Its elephant, beaver, and bear would not have been uppermost in the minds of Egyptian priests when they invented hieroglyphs.⁹

The *Hieroglyphica* asserts that its Greek text is a translation of an Egyptian original. This appears to be an imposture like that of the authors of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The trickster here may not have been "Horapollo," but rather a scribe or the putative translator, who identifies himself as Philippos. I think that he merely acquired a Greek text but pretended to have translated it. Would a Greco-Roman author have used hieroglyphs to write a dictionary of hieroglyphs? Such a thing is possible, but not in this case: the compiler was not fluent enough. As for Philippos, if he was capable of translating Egyptian, why did he not comment on the mistakes and misrepresentations committed in the incompetent text? The obvious answer is that the *Hieroglyphica* never was an Egyptian text, and no one involved was a reliable Egyptologist. The native culture of Egypt had been too much obscured by its foreign rulers and occupiers. The

Hieroglyphica makes puns and reveals etymologies that would only apply in Greek.¹⁰ Iversen and others place Philippos in Roman times, not long after Horapollon.¹¹ Still others think that Philippos lived as late as the 1400s.

THE TRANSMISSION OF THE TEXT

Cristoforo de' Buondelmonti (1380–1430) was a Florentine priest. In 1414, he settled on the island of Rhodes. From this base, he explored the Aegean. He wrote geographical guidebooks about the area.¹² In about 1419, he was exploring the island of Andros. He was a dedicated seeker of antiquities.¹³ Cristoforo happened upon the rare *Hieroglyphica*. He returned to Florence in 1422 and presented the manuscript to Poggio Bracciolini and Niccolò de' Niccoli, both prominent humanists and hunters of ancient books. Nine fifteenth-century copies of the *Hieroglyphica* reportedly exist.¹⁴ Latin translations of the *Hieroglyphica*, or parts of it, must soon have been available. It began to influence the polymath Alberti in the 1430s, if not earlier.

FAMOUS RENAISSANCE HIEROGLYPHS

When Leone Battista Alberti (1404–1472) created a self-portrait on a bronze medallion (ca. 1438), he added a mysterious hieroglyph: a detached eye sprouts a pair of wings and emits peculiar tendrils. The latter could be organic (blood or nerves), energetic (light or lightning), or abstract (movement or sensation).

Art historians have oddly neglected the *Hieroglyphica* in this context. That dictionary gives us the hieroglyph of a hawk: “God is symbolized by it, because the bird is prolific and long-lived, or perhaps rather it seems to be an image of the sun.... [Horus was a sun god whose sacred animal was a hawk.] Under the form of a hawk they sometimes depict the god as the *Lord of Vision*.” The symbolism of the eye is not discussed, but it obviously can represent *Vision*. Alberti has reduced the hawk to its wings

and has combined them with the “eye of God,” which was already a familiar trope. The text has the further advantage of explaining why Alberti’s emblematic eye should have tendrils: they are rivulets of blood. Horapollon includes a succinct list of meanings: “God, or height, or lowness, or excellence, or blood, or victory.”¹⁵ I would guess that the blood vessels in Alberti’s hieroglyph are meant to transfer the symbolism of the divine eye to the human eye (which requires blood). Alberti, a humanist, thus proclaims our own godlike nature and our potential to be visionaries.

Matteo de’ Pasti (ca. 1448) designed a portrait medal for Alberti and ornamented the reverse side with Alberti’s hieroglyphic eye placed within a circular wreath. The traditional meaning of a wreath is “victory,” which agrees with one of the meanings of the hawk in the *Hieroglyphica*. Alberti’s own testimony has been found in *Anuli*, a dialog of his.¹⁶ The eye symbolizes God’s omniscience and reminds us to be similarly wide awake. Alberti mostly discusses the wreath/crown, which he interprets as “joy and glory.” He fails to explain the wings. He does not *want* to explain. “I prefer to be most brief, for to give a comprehensive account of such a concentrated subject would be prolix.” He does not *need* to explain. “You yourself, according to the extent of your knowledge, will be able, if you put your mind to it, to comprehend the meaning thoroughly and clearly.” In these two statements, Alberti revives the ancient attitudes toward hieroglyphs: the Egyptian priests kept the symbolism secret, and the Platonist philosophers sought mystical revelations in it.

Alberti, in his *De Re Aedificatoria* (*Concerning Architectural Matters*), recommends hieroglyphics for use by architects. When engraving a monument, he says, they should refrain from using standard script, for it is confined to one culture. They should use sacred “Egyptian letters,” whose meanings are universal and eternal.

If we lack Alberti’s intuitive powers, Renaissance hieroglyphs can be baffling. They do not conform to an Egyptian style, because European artists in those days knew virtually nothing of it. Granted, the ancient Romans acquired Egyptian artifacts bearing inscriptions, and erudite Egyptians sometimes advised Roman sculptors when they were carving inscriptions on pseudo-Egyptian works. However, very few Renaissance

artists (ca. 1440) would have been able to examine those antiquities. Also rare were drawings brought by travelers from Egypt. As a consequence, Renaissance “hieroglyphs” were not archaeologically correct. The new emblems were rendered with the optical naturalism that became typical in the Renaissance.

Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) illustrated images from the *Hieroglyphica*.¹⁷ Dürer’s sheet of drawings is in Berlin’s Staatliche Museum.¹⁸ One of Dürer’s subjects is the Egyptian “shrine-bearer.” The *Hieroglyphica* says that the officer should be represented as a house guard. Dürer never saw the Egyptian artists’ flat figures and minimal costumes. His house guard is volumetric and is dressed in a fur hat, heavy coat, tights, and baggy boots. Few viewers today would peruse this picture and conclude, “That’s an Egyptian hieroglyph.” We must look carefully if we want to find the *Hieroglyphica* behind any Renaissance art.

Dürer’s famous “hieroglyphic” allegory is central to the “Triumphal Arch” of Emperor Maximilian (1459–1519). It is not an architectural monument but a large poster (11.5 x 9.75 feet) made from 192 adjoining prints on paper. Dürer does not cause his patron to resemble a pharaoh, and the surrounding hieroglyphs do not resemble the Egyptian kind. Instead, Maximilian is a typical German monarch of his era, except for being seated amid a menagerie of living animals ([figure 4.1](#)). They largely accord with entries in the *Hieroglyphica*.¹⁹

Above Maximilian’s head, Dürer places a star to symbolize God’s providence. It blesses Maximilian with his intellectual gifts. His crown is ornamented with a “basilisk,” which would have been a cobra when decorating the headdress of the ancient pharaoh. The ornament is a symbol of power, for, according to the old legends, the very breath of a basilisk can inflict death. Maximilian holds a scepter wrapped by a serpent. In the *Hieroglyphica*, a “divided” serpent denotes a king who rules part of the world. (Dürer refrains from cutting the serpent in half but divides it with a ribbon around the middle.) Maximilian also holds a globe surmounted by a falcon. The latter, referring to the sun god Horus, is a hieroglyph for greatness, as we learned when analyzing Alberti’s allegorical eye. The emperor sits on a sheaf of papyrus stalks, signifying venerable origins. (The “sheaf” in the *Hieroglyphica*, I suppose, refers to papyrus pages,

thereby evoking an ancient document as proof of a distinguished ancestry.) Standing on the bundle of stalks is a crane (symbol of vigilant defense) and a dog (symbol of attentive devotion). Flanking the emperor are a bull (temperance and courage) and a lion (spiritedness and strength). At the bottom of the tableau are two naked feet. They are meant to be standing on water, and they translate as “the impossible.” Maximilian’s “impossible” deeds were his victories over consecutive French kings. The emperor’s success is symbolized here by his armored feet dominating a rooster (Latin *gallus*), a punning emblem for a Frenchman (Latin *Gallus*). The French previously had conquered Milan: thus, the rooster clutches a viper, evocative of Milan because its rulers, the Visconti-Sforzas, had adopted the viper as one of their heraldic devices. The French and Milanese emblems are not found in the *Hieroglyphica*.



Figure 4.1. Dürer's "hieroglyph" for "Maximilian's Triumphal Arch," adjoining woodcuts, German, ca. 1515.

HIEROGLYPHS IN THE RENAISSANCE TAROT

By the current theory, the Tarot trumps are early examples of the Renaissance enthusiasm for the creation of new hieroglyphs. Robert Place

has arrived at the same conclusion.²⁰ A demonstration is difficult because of the choices exercised by Renaissance artists:

- A. They might adapt the *Hieroglyphica* in their own way (as did Alberti).
- B. They might defy our expectations of ancient Egyptian styles (as did Dürer).

Alberti's philosophy of symbolism may provide two reasons why the first Tarotists refrained from writing about the trumps.

- The first Tarotists did not *want* to advertise the cards' meanings. The deep significations of the hieroglyphics should be kept secret, as the Egyptian priests had done.
- The first Tarotists did not *need* to advertise the cards' meanings. Gifted persons of any time and place would be able to intuit the meanings of hieroglyphs, as the Platonists had done.

HIEROGLYPHS, TRUMP BY TRUMP

For every Tarot trump, I will cite some connection to Egyptian symbolism as it was understood in Renaissance Italy. To my knowledge, this has not been done previously. I depend on the imagery of the *T de M*. For relationships with the *Hieroglyphica*, whenever I can find them, I will give references (section I or II, followed by the number of the item in the lexicon).

1. The Juggler gives prominence to the hands as they hold magical implements, actually signs of destiny (in the lots that he dispenses as the Good Demon). The *Hieroglyphica* says that a hand denotes "a man who enjoys building" [II, 119]. I think that we can extend this hieroglyph to mean "a spirit who enjoys creating."

2. The Popess holds a book. A sheaf of papyri indicates an ancient heritage, according to the *Hieroglyphica* [I, 30]. It says that one's origins cannot be traced to their ultimate beginning. Additionally, a book symbolizes the "very old" [II, 27]. Apparently the Popess conveys something from ages past. I would suggest that it is one's inherited traits.
3. The Empress, for most Tarotists, includes the symbolism of motherhood. The hieroglyph for motherhood is the vulture [I, 11]. It appears on the shield held by the Empress in the *T de M*.
4. The Emperor has a shield emblazoned with an eagle, a hieroglyph for a king who is aloof and intolerant of mistakes [II, 56]. Note that, in our *T de M*, the Emperor's eagle is noticeably different from the Empress's vulture.
5. The Pope wears heavy vestments. His cloak or scarf is possibly meant to double as the mysterious "stole" that the *Hieroglyphica* cites as a symbol of governance [I, 40].
6. The Love card in the *T de M* does not obviously rely on the *Hieroglyphica*. The male "lover" stands between Pleasure (the cute girl) and Virtue (the homely girl). But the latter has an attractive personality: she wears a laurel wreath, a symbol of achievement. A laurel wreath figures in the medallion that Matteo de' Pasti designed for Alberti, who regarded the wreath as a hieroglyph for "joy and glory."
7. In the *T de M*, the charioteer wears a breastplate. The armor in this context could relate to the "trophy" of the ancient Greeks. Where they defeated an opposing army, they assembled breastplates to mark the victory. The Romans depicted such trophies in triumphal parades and on commemorative monuments. Trophy armor endured as a motif on Greek and Roman coins. The breastplate is not listed in the *Hieroglyphica*. The antiquarian Cyriacus of Ancona (ca.

1391–ca. 1450), during his travels in Egypt, reported that he had seen the breastplate as a hieroglyph meaning “triumph” (figure 4.2).

8. In our version of the *T de M* (figure 0.1), Justice wears a crown emblazoned with a simple motif, two concentric circles: ⦿. It is centered on the crown, and Justice is centered in the card. Renaissance designers used the concentric circles to symbolize “the Middle Way,” meaning the moderate position where truth is said to reside, in most cases. The relevance to the virtue of Justice is obvious. The *Hieroglyphica* has no emblem for the Middle Way. The symbolism of the encircled dot dates back to Plato, at least, and possibly to Pythagoras. Both are said to have studied in Egypt.

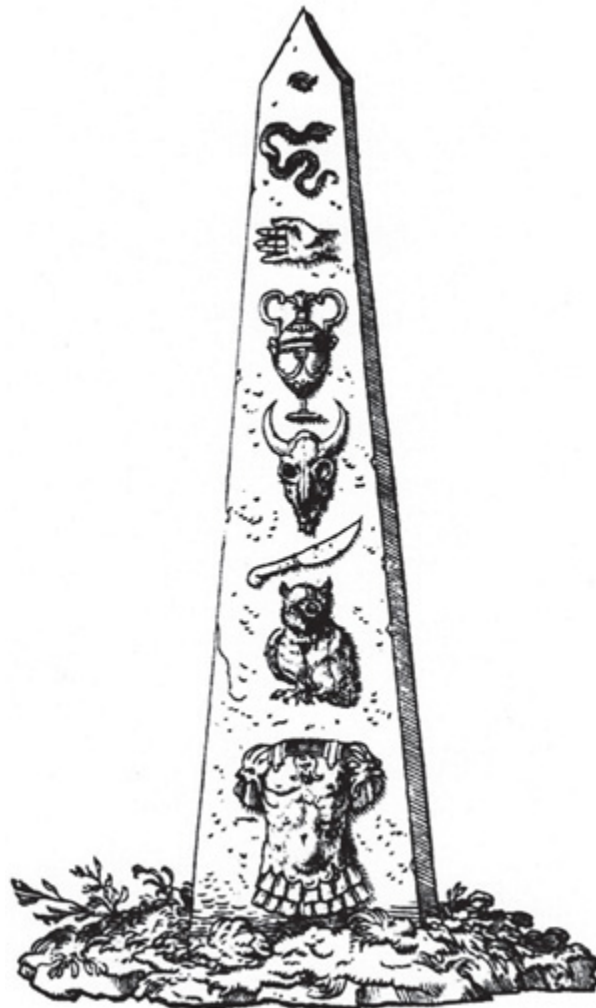


Figure 4.2. Obelisk with hieroglyphs honoring the triumphs of Alexander the Great, woodcut.
(From *Cosmographie du Levant*, Paris, 1575.)

9. The Hermit originally carried not a lantern but an hourglass, signifying an astrologer. As a hieroglyph, he would be the astrologer-priest called the *horoscopos* (“hour marker”). The *Hieroglyphica* describes the *horoscopos* as “a man eating the hours” [I, 42]. When Albrecht Dürer visualized this hieroglyph, he dutifully showed a man cramming an hourglass into his mouth. The Tarot designer more reasonably assumed that the text really intended that the man should observe, display, or declare the hours. The card is not merely a symbol of “time” but of “timing.”
10. The Wheel is not cataloged in the *Hieroglyphica*. Instead, as we saw, the dictionary discusses baboons as Thoth’s functionaries; their behavior allegedly marked eclipses, moonrise, the equinoxes, and the hourly intervals at the equinoxes [I, 14-16]. This, I suppose, accounts for the apes that scamper around the Tarot’s Wheel. Of course, even without the support of the *Hieroglyphica*, wheels symbolize cyclical change.
11. The personification of Fortitude subdues a lion. The foreparts of a lion form a hieroglyph for “strength” [I, 18].
12. The Hanged Man, as Gertrude Moakley has established, derives from Renaissance “shame paintings.”²¹ Portraits of criminals were displayed, upside down, to disgrace them publicly. The *Hieroglyphica* cites a ladder as a hieroglyph for “a siege” [II, 28]. This might be taken as a metaphor for “prolonged suffering.” I suggest that the truncated branches, as seen in the *T de M*, were used as ladder rungs. The man’s tormentors would have climbed the rungs to hoist him onto the gibbet.
13. Although the *Hieroglyphica* does not list a symbol for Death, Latin editions of the book give the *mask* as a hieroglyph for departed spirits. The symbolism may have derived from the Latin *larva*, which can be translated as “mask” or as “ghost.” With this

orientation, we can see a mask on the face of Death in our *T de M*. Skeletons were, in ancient Roman art, standard representations of ghosts.

14. Temperance pours water between vessels. A rush of water, from above to below, is a hieroglyph for “rebirth” (related to the rain that regenerates the crops) [I, 21].
15. The Devil apparently combines several repugnant animals: goat, oryx, and bat. As hieroglyphs, they respectively symbolize lust [I, 48], blasphemy [I, 49], and weakness and audacity [II, 52].
16. A hieroglyphic aspect of the Tower may be the implied thunderclap. The *Hieroglyphica* says that when the Egyptians try to include the sound of thunder in a drawing, it means a “distant voice” [I, 29]. Surely it is of divine origin. The Tower is a conventional symbol of Purgatory. Souls in Purgatory still have the option of heeding God’s Word and gaining salvation.
17. A star, says the *Hieroglyphica*, means *Heimarmene* (“Fate,” “Fortune,” “Destiny”). The *Hieroglyphica* also defines a star as God’s providence. He bestows it on the stars, which control our world [I, 13].
18. The Moon in the *T de M* acquired a dog and a wolf baying at the lunar light. The Moon trump could include a dog merely because “the dog, beyond all other beasts, looks intently upon the images of the gods” [I, 39]. Thus, the Moon here is not a lifeless satellite but a divinity.
19. The Sun card of the standard *T de M* shows two persons reaching out to touch each other. According to the *Hieroglyphica*, a greeting between two men expresses “concord” or “unanimity” [II, 11].
20. Judgment features an angel, whose characteristic attributes are surely the wings. According to the *Hieroglyphica*, wings mean “wind” [II, 15]. A. T. Cory, in his translation of the *Hieroglyphica*

(1840), offers the deeper meaning of “soul or spirit” (compare “inspiration,” “aspiration,” “respiration”—all having the word “spirit” at their root and all having relevance to the Judgment card).

21. The central subject of the *T de M* World, as I insisted in my introduction, can be seen as Isis. The *Hieroglyphica* only says that Isis appears as a woman [I, 3]. Still, she has a fairly prominent place in the text.

THE FOOL

In the *T de M*, the Fool is shown under attack by an ambiguous animal, usually perceived as a dog or cat (alternatively, a tiger, leopard, or lynx, depending on our authorities). I see it as a hyena, unfamiliar to Renaissance artists and unlikely to be convincingly portrayed by them. In the *Hieroglyphica*, the hyena symbolizes one who is unstable, sometimes strong and sometimes weak, “because this creature is at times male and at times female” [II, 69].

I have proposed that the Fool would not have been present in the hypothetical 14-trump Tarot, but was added later. Throughout the process, the designers apparently consulted the *Hieroglyphica*. I infer that developments occurred rapidly, before the project could drift from its sources.

POLYSEMY AGAIN

The Renaissance designer must have felt mixed emotions when reading the *Hieroglyphica*. Here at last he seemingly had a unique opportunity to peer into the semiotics of the pharaohs and their priests. And yet the book lacks the complex and mystical interpretations that the Neoplatonists had taught everyone to expect. Dürer settled for the meager lexicon. He employed the *Hieroglyphica* mechanically, piling up individual signs in little more than a code. Alberti had a different response to the text and a

different result in his art. He was inspired to use his own creativity to synthesize various symbols into highly condensed allegories. In effect, he supplied the mysticism that was absent from the *Hieroglyphica*. Both approaches appear in the *T de M*. Each trump, as I perceive it, contains a key “hieroglyph,” usually from the *Hieroglyphica*, but the artist has gone much further, adopting the Neoplatonist mode and embedding the textbook hieroglyph in a larger allegory having multiple strata of meaning. In the Tarot, these levels do not come from the *Hieroglyphica* but from the different studies that were supposedly inaugurated by Thoth and mastered by Hermes Trismegistus. The Tarot’s form is “hieroglyphic,” while its content is Hermetic. Arithmology, astrolatry, and mystagogy are the topics of the next three chapters.

Numinous Numbers



MYSTICAL MATH

Thoth's followers credited him with the creation of numbers. Their esoteric aspects are numerology and arithmology. The former is widely familiar. Numerologists analyze clients through their birth dates and/or names converted to key numbers. Key numbers from other dates and names may identify them as auspicious or inauspicious for the client. Arithmology likewise involves numbers and numerical relationships, but these are taken as symbols of metaphysical principles. They will become clear as we examine the Tarot trumps.

We have not inherited mystical mathematics directly from the temples of Thoth. The Western tradition of number symbolism descends to us through Pythagoras. He was a Greek, born on the island of Samos in the sixth century BC. He reputedly studied among the Syrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians. According to Plutarch, Pythagoras's Egyptian teacher was Oenuphis of On.¹ Clement of Alexandria names Sonchis.² Pythagoras is supposed to have invented the term "philosopher" ("lover of wisdom"). In southern Italy, he founded a colony for philosophical studies. He accepted both males and females, if they met his stringent testing. He taught strict morals, the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, and vegetarianism because of his respect for animals. He is best known for his belief that numbers form the foundation of all phenomena.

Plato occasionally attempted to integrate his own theories with the Pythagorean numbers. Plato's most famous theory is that of ideal forms. He recognized that the world is marred by instability, ugliness, and evil, all qualities that could not have been imposed by the Mind of God, who is perfect. God is unchanging, beautiful, and good. The discrepancy can be explained if the world is a copy of the Ideal, for the copy is inferior, especially as it is rendered in recalcitrant matter. We should take solace in the knowledge that our imperfect world was not intended by God but is a warped version of the forms that God has in mind (in Mind). How are we to understand those forms? We are inclined to imagine them in sensory terms, but this is a low level of thought, still attached to perceptions of matter. Platonist theories resort to numbers as the Ideals and thereby rise to a high level of abstraction.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SEVEN

An important key to the Tarot's number symbolism is Seven, the Septenary. It operates in several ways, including the following:

- The seventh trump is given a crucial role.
- A special alliance exists between any two trumps whose numbers add up to seven.
- The earliest Tarot seems to have had 14 trumps. The total of 21 would automatically entail another septenary.
- Seven of the trumps personify seven Virtues.

Seven among the Lower 14 Trumps

Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius (fl. 430) was a Roman commentator, probably born in North Africa but now assumed to have been active in Italy and to have ascended as praetorian prefect of Italy in 430. In

medieval Italy, local legend erroneously identified Parma as his birthplace and Parma's cathedral as his burial site. The tomb's supposed ruins were visible in the 1300s but vanished sometime thereafter.³ On the façade of the cathedral, the tomb of the astronomer Biagio Pelacani (d. 1416) has two portrait sculptures: one represents the deceased, and the other, equally prominent, represents Macrobius.⁴ His reputation was great in the early Renaissance.

Macrobius authored at least three works: a specialized grammar book (now lost but known in a medieval abridgment), the *Saturnalia* (a lengthy miscellany about Roman culture), and an ambitious commentary on the dream of Scipio (*Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis*). Cicero (106–43 BC), in the sixth book of his *De Re Publica* (*On the State*), pretended to quote Scipio on his nocturnal vision. In his dream, Scipio ascended through the heavens and communed with the departed soul of his adoptive grandfather, Scipio Africanus, the conquerer of Carthage. Cicero makes the two observers look down from their celestial vantage point and discuss the structure of the planetary system, the comparative smallness of Rome's territory, the fleeting nature of fame, and the greater importance of attaining an afterlife among the stars. Macrobius comments on Cicero's narrative in order to prove that Cicero was a devoted Platonist. This much is valid, but Macrobius overstates the mystical nature of Cicero's philosophy. While Cicero was a moderate Middle Platonist interested in politics, Macrobius was an ardent Neoplatonist interested in metaphysics.

Neoplatonism had absorbed Neopythagoreanism. Not surprisingly, Macrobius weaves number symbolism into his commentary. Of special interest to us is Macrobius's attention to pairs of numbers that add up to Seven. His deliberations also extend to the number Eight. All this appears to underlie the first eight trumps of the *Tarot de Marseille*. In the following entries, I have added classical and Christian concepts not mentioned by Macrobius but entirely familiar in Italy when the Tarot was created.

Trumps One and Six. In the *T de M*, One is accommodated by the Juggler, and Six by Love. The Juggler, as Agathodemon, is the guardian spirit. He also appears on the Love card of the *T de M*. It represents “the choice of

Hercules” or “Hercules at the crossroads.” The hero meets two allegorical women, Virtue and Pleasure. He must choose between them and thus foreshadow the course of his life. In the card, his *daimon* appears as Cupid, god of love. The basic story is credited to Prodicus (fl. 400 BC) and is recorded by the contemporary Xenophon.⁵ The visualization of the *daimon* depended on the notions of each illustrator or patron. Girolamo di Benvenuto (1470–1524), in his painting now in the Galleria Franchetti (Venice), depicted a heavily draped youth floating in a cloud and holding a flaming arrowhead or spearhead (figure 5.1). However, in some Renaissance prints, the *daimon* manifests itself as a nude and winged Cupid, complete with bow and arrow. (See Cristofano Robetta’s print, a variation on the “Choice of Hercules.”)

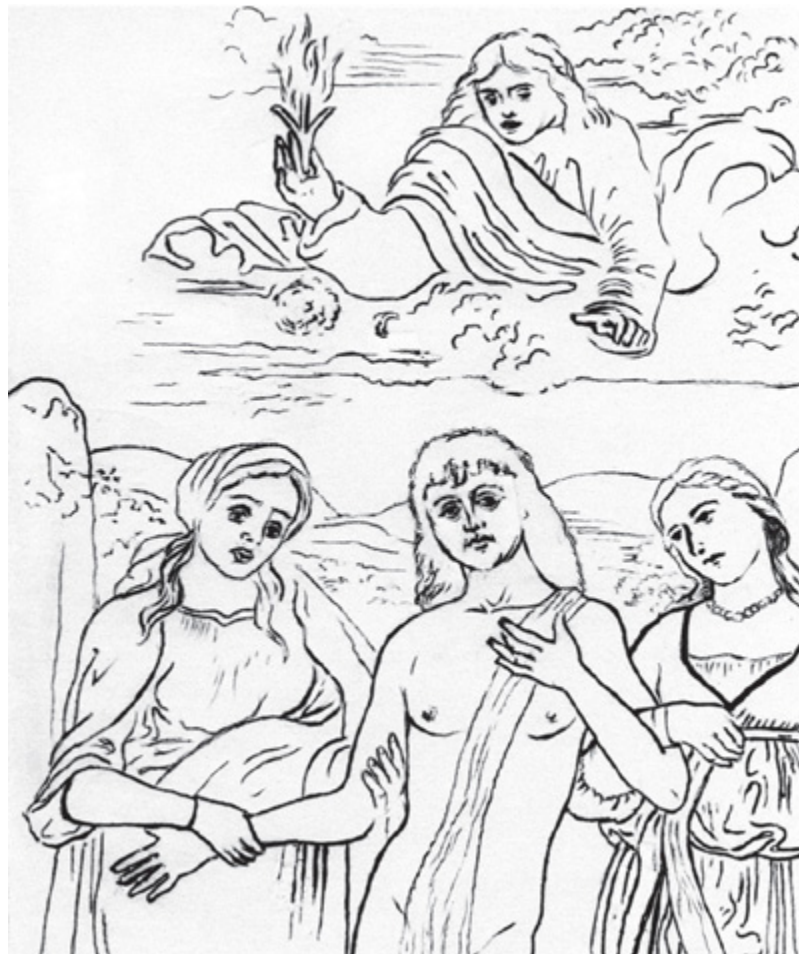


Figure 5.1. Author’s drawing of “Hercules at the Crossroads” (central detail), after painting by Girolamo di Benvenuto, Italian, ca. 1500. (Original: Galleria Franchetti, Ca’ d’Oro, Venice.)

Trumps Two and Five. A connection between the Popess and the Pope seems certain, given their similar appearance. Trump Two refers to God's Wisdom, while trump Five refers to God's Grace. The Popess is a latter-day version of Sophia, the hypostasis of Wisdom. According to Philo (ca. 20 BC–ca. AD 50), the Monad (absolute Oneness) is assisted by the Dyad (absolute Twoness). He associates the Monad with God, the Dyad with Sophia. This context gives Wisdom a spiritual mystique, which may contribute to the ecclesiastical costume for the Popess. The number Five was still more revered by Christian Pythagoreans. Christ blessed five barley loaves with which he miraculously fed 5,000 people who listened to his sermons. He suffered five wounds at his crucifixion. His Hebrew name, Joshua, is spelled with five letters: *Yod-Heh-Shin-Vau-Heh*.

Trumps Three and Four. The third trump (Empress) is obviously related to the fourth trump (Emperor). Macrobius notes that three points (nonlinear) can determine a plane, and four elements (earth, water, air, fire) can generate a solid. Coordinating this with the Tarot, we could suppose that the Empress personifies manifestation in the intelligible realm (planes are mental abstractions) while the Emperor personifies manifestation in the physical realm (solids are perceptible objects).

Notice that the above formulas—One plus Six; Two plus Five; Three plus Four—serve to organize the trumps in the *T de M* and no other standard Tarot. Only in the *T de M* and its derivatives has the Love card been contrived so that the superior figure can be seen as Agathodaimon, thereby linking trump Six with trump One ($6 + 1 = 7$).

The number Seven itself receives ample attention from Macrobius. The meanings are exceedingly diverse. I can somewhat condense them under the heading of *development*, emphasizing growth and movement. Along these lines, Macrobius relates Seven to stages of human gestation, maturation, and time cycles in general. Seven controls the motions of the moon, which was regarded as the administrator of organic growth. Macrobius recognizes seven lunar phases: three stages of waxing, then the full moon, followed by three stages of waning. Macrobius counts the planetary spheres downward from Saturn to the moon as closest to the earth, which was thought to be at the center of the universe; the moon is

therefore the seventh celestial sphere. Macrobius also finds Seven behind the 28 days of the lunar cycle. These lunar associations are repeated by Martianus Capella, whom we met in [chapter 1](#). He further involves 28 by maintaining that Seven subsumes all the lower numbers, and $7 + 6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 28$. Macrobius is also helpful when he construes Seven as Motion, not in stages, but in directions: up, down, left, right, forward, backward, and rotational. The Chariot is laden with the symbolism of Motion.

THE PYTHAGOREAN DECAD

Renaissance designers were well acquainted with number symbolism, easily found in several ancient sources besides Macrobius. His hero Plato incorporated Pythagoreanism in his *Timaeus*. Philo was an Alexandrian Jew of the first century who was dedicated to a Pythagorean analysis of scripture, but I am not aware of the extent to which he influenced the Christian Middle Ages and early Renaissance. Theon of Smyrna (fl. 125) wrote *Mathematics Useful for Understanding Plato*, which includes a study of the Pythagorean Decad (the first ten integers). Of several mathematical works by Nicomachus of Gerasa (fl. 150), the most helpful is his *Introduction to Arithmetic*, which was translated by Boethius and by Apuleius. Nicomachus's *Theology of Arithmetic* exists in fragments. Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis* recommended Pythagoreanism to readers in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Other Neoplatonists offered such tidbits, too. Calcidius (early 300s?) wrote about Plato's *Timaeus*, and the commentary was valued until the Renaissance. Many writers on Pythagoreanism like to pretend that the old texts on number symbolism are consistent. In fact, the sources frequently conflict, and wide-ranging interpretations are feasible. We do not have Pythagoras's doctrine purely as he taught it. It interacted with Gnosticism, Christianity, Islam, and different philosophies. Consider the number of Justice. It is Two (according to Nicomachus of Gerasa and Martianus Capella), Four (according to Alexander of Aphrodisias), Five (according to Theon of Smyrna), Six ("resembling Justice," according to an anonymous *Theology*

of *Arithmetic*), Eight (according to Macrobius), or Thirty-two (according to Cornelius Agrippa).

Number symbolism can be educed from a welter of sources—the natural environment, philosophy, religion, mythology, literature, art, historical events. Furthermore, the cabalists made ample use of Gematria: because the Hebrew letters have numerical values, a sum can be produced from names, words, phrases, sentences, and so forth. Martianus Capella used the same sort of computations in Greek. According to Tertullian (fl. 200), the Gnostics derived 888 from the name of Jesus.⁶ Eight often had a cosmic or mystical context, as among the Egyptian gods (the Ogdoad, those eight companions of Thoth), the fixed stars (the eighth sphere, when we count upward from the moon), enlightenment (after seven stages of initiation), the Judgment Day (as the eighth day after the biblical seven), and Christian baptism (administered from a font having eight sides, variously explained). The Tarot designer would have confronted a bewildering array of opinions. Which one was chosen for application in the Tarot?

I find that the Tarot's use of the Decad depends simply on the very nature of each number as it was analyzed by mathematicians. For instance, as Macrobius explains, Eight symbolizes Justice because that number is evenly constituted, more impressively than the other integers of the Decad. Eight divides equally into two even numbers that themselves divide equally into two even numbers. Eight is balanced and “even-handed,” like Justice. In this way, the basic symbolism of Eight need not depend on any distinct experience or association extraneous to pure mathematics. For some trumps, their symbolism arises from arithmetic and also from geometry. In the case of Justice in the *T de M*, she holds balances with two pans, each suspended so as to imply a tetrahedron (a pyramid with four faces): $2 \times 4 = 8$.

Juggler/One. Unity exists prior to Magnitudes and Multitudes. The archetypal One is likened to the geometer's point, which is conceivable but not perceptible. The Tarot designer would have had trouble indicating a dimensionless point, but it could be implied as the center of the ball or disk in the Juggler's hand. However, the Tarot's designer may have felt no

obligation to include an explicit symbol for Oneness in this card, because One is not a number. Again, One *precedes* numeration.

Popess/Two. Two emanates from One. The point (Oneness), taken twice, determines a line. A line can be a segment having two ends; a line can be a boundary producing two domains. Twoness allows for Discernment. That is a mental process, and mentation may be implied by the book that the Popess consults. Historically, the book had first belonged to personifications of Sophia (Wisdom) but later was transferred to Prudence, the Virtue that requires clear reasoning.⁷ The Popess appropriately has a tiara: “The simple acquire folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge” (Psalm 14:18). For a comparable Prudence, see the fresco of Good Government in Siena’s Palazzo Pubblico, where the Virtue wears a golden crown.

Empress/Three. Lines become the boundaries of planar shapes. The most simple polygon is the triangle. Plato analyzed all planar shapes into triangles. Plane figures have only two dimensions and exist in the intellectual realm. I have interpreted the Empress as intellectual Manifestation. Plane figures, strictly speaking, do not exist in our sensory realm but are only inferred from the surfaces of solid figures. Conversely, planes are the abstract foundations from which concrete objects can emanate. The number Three further suggests this process of Becoming, for all processes have three stages: beginning, middle, and end. Three is called “the first Completion.”

Emperor/Four. The number Four allows for Manifestation in the physical universe. A fourth point, located outside the triangle of three points, can produce the most simple solid, the tetrahedron. The Emperor in the *T de M* sits with one leg fully extended and crossed by the other, bent at the knee. Some viewers interpret this posture as forming the numeral 4.

Pope/Five. Five points can be inferred in the cross, having the four endpoints of the arms and a fifth point at their intersection. Hopper traces this format to ancient Persia and India: the *Rig Veda* derives Five from the four compass directions, plus “here.”⁸ Among Christians, of course, the

cross is an explicit reminder of Christ. A different orientation of the cross is called the “quincunx” (X), which naturally has the same five points. It has great potential as a mystical and an alchemical symbol.⁹ Éliphas Lévi perceived a quincunx formed by the five heads in the Pope card of the *T de M*. (For this to work, the tops of the two columns must qualify as “heads.” The tops are of course called “capitals,” a word deriving from the Latin *caput*, meaning “head.”) Five is regenerated when multiplied by any odd number. Martianus Capella says that Five keeps popping up everywhere. It thus symbolizes Universality and associates with the pervasive quintessence (“fifth essence”), the spirit that unites the four elements. The Tarot’s choice of a papal figure suggests a pun on Catholicism, which nurtures the spirit and has a universal reach.

Love/Six. In mathematical terms, Six is “perfect” because it is equal to the sum of its factors, excluding itself ($6 = 1 + 2 + 3$), as Macrobius observes. Marriage could be regarded as the restoration of the soul’s perfection. The soul, when created, was perfect and was spherical (infinitely symmetrical). But events in the world’s Creation divided the unisex soul into a male and a female with contrasting bodies. Thus all humans search for completion by union with a mate. Pythagoreans are explicit in interpreting Six as Marriage and also as Venus, the goddess of love. Six is the “second Completion.” Perfection and Completion recall “joy and glory,” which I mentioned when discussing this card in [chapter 4](#).

Chariot/Seven. Seven cannot be generated by the multiplication of other numbers within the Decad, and no other numbers within the Decad can be generated by the multiplication of Seven. Since, in the terms just stated, the Seven is neither generated nor generative, the arithmologists called it Athena (or her Roman equivalent, Minerva). That goddess was not generated by parents, nor did she generate any children. By association with the mythology, Seven was called “Virgin” and “All-armored” (*Panteuchos*). Athena was the virgin goddess and was the patroness of strategic warfare. I cannot say whether any of the Tarot charioteers is the armored Athena herself, but armor is prominent in the *T de M* version. Three and Four are addends of Seven. The Three connoted the soul (having

three parts—rational, spirited, appetitive—according to Plato) while the Four connoted the body (having four elements—fire, air, water, earth—according to Zoroaster and Empedocles). Therefore the Seven can represent the soul incarnate. According to Agrippa, esoterists referred to Seven as “the vehicle.”¹⁰ This refers to the ancient belief that the body and soul together formed a conveyance for the mind.

Justice/Eight. Nicomachus of Gerasa says that Eight is named “Law.” We saw that Macrobius identified this number with Justice because both are so well balanced. In the *T de M*, as we learned, the crown of Justice bears a glyph for “the middle way.”

Hermit/Nine. The number Nine stands at the end of the sequence of single digits, and the Hermit, as *Gobbo* (Old Man), stands at the end of life. Nine is “three Threes” ($3 + 3 + 3$). Nine is the Third Completion, “completely complete.” Since Nine nevertheless looks toward other realms, beyond the single digits, it is called “the horizon.” The term will acquire further significance later when we consider the card’s astrological symbolism.

Wheel/Ten. The number Ten has been described as “circular” (see [chapter 3](#)). Ten is also the end of a cycle. This number provides the transition to a new set of numbers (the double digits). The “circular” and cyclical Ten is nicely evoked by a wheel.

Mnemonic Signs in the Decad

Each of the first ten trumps in the *T de M* appears to have yet another motif that bolsters the number symbolism. (The Tarot by Nicolas Conver works best.) This attention to Ten is appropriate among Pythagoreans, for whom the Decad is fundamental in their calculations.

The Juggler’s jacket has **one** horizontal band (and sometimes one vertical: the numeral **I**).

The Popess holds a book, having **two** pages visible.

The Empress has **three** bands in her sash and a triangle motif in her collar and at her bodice.

The Emperor's jerkin has **four** horizontal bands. Variations have **IV** concealed near the collar.¹¹

The Pope blesses a supplicant who raises his hand, displaying **five** digits.

On the Love card, the hero's jerkin has **six** horizontal bands (and six verticals on his chest).

The Charioteer's armor features the moon, controlled by the archetypal **Seven** (see above).

Justice sits on a high-back throne. It has finials shaped like the numeral **8**.

The Hermit was known to Italians as *Gobbo*, "Hunchback." His posture makes the curved **9**.

The Wheel has spokes that form an X, the Roman numeral for **10**.

The Wheel also has a cross, implied by a crank handle and a vertical bracket. Medieval scholastics, when compiling lists, marked every tenth item with a cross ([figure 5.2](#)). Following this formula, we should find a cross in the twentieth trump, Judgment. (Take a look.)



Figure 5.2. Mnemonic images, woodcut. (From Johannes Romberch, *Congestiorum Artificiosae Memoriae*, Venice, 1533.)

The scholastics pictured a notational hand beside the fifth item in each Decad (see again [figure 5.2](#)). This applies to trumps Five and Fifteen in the *T de M*. Why else does the Devil bother to raise an open hand? This use of a hand as a mnemonic image dates back to the *Ad Herrenium*.¹² The book was addressed to Roman orators (ca. 85 BC) and was consulted into the time of the Renaissance.

BEYOND THE DECAD

The numbers higher than 10 are especially ambiguous in their symbolism. For example, the numbers sometimes can be broken down into factors, each with its own interpretation. But is 16 meant to be factored as 2×8 , or 4×4 , or $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$, or something else? Some numerologists would treat 16 as the sum of $1 + 6$ and so relate it to 7. Problems arise with other numbers. We can convert 19 by adding 1 and 9, thereby producing 10. But we can regard 10 as the sum of 1 and 0, thus arriving at 1. Is 19 essentially 10 or 1? When Martianus Capella reduced the number 1,218, he added all the digits. But why was he not content with 12, a number rich in symbolism? He proceeded to add the digits of 12 to arrive at 3.

The remaining number symbolism in the Tarot yields to a specific key. It is given in the eleventh trump of the *T de M*. There, a woman is shown subduing a male lion. She wears one of those broad-brimmed hats. In this instance, I think, the hat indicates a certain symmetry with the Juggler. She would seem to be Unity in another sphere (beyond the Decad: $10 + 1$). All the higher trumps can be seen to obey the general formula. Thus, 12 relates to 2; 13 relates to 3; 14 relates to 4, and so on. In effect, we return to the Decad, but we apply interpretations that we neglected in the first cycle. This formula has been used by Rachel Pollack in her *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom*. However, I will make different comments on the same computations. (We differ in another way when interpreting trump 11. It is Fortitude in the *T de M* but Justice in the Waite/Smith Tarot, which Pollack uses.)

11. Strength ($10 + 1$. Cf. One) Strength provides a new integrity comparable to the Juggler's. She is his female counterpart. The esoteric name of the first trump, *Genius*, is a masculine noun, while the name of the eleventh trump, *Fortitudo*, is a feminine noun.

12. Hanged Man ($10 + 2$. Cf. Two) Our bafflement with life is emphasized in the twelfth trump, the Hanged Man. In the *T de M*, the posts of the gibbet have twelve lopped branches. The blunt cuts typically are shaped like droplets and are colored red. An allusion to blood seems

intentional. The Hanged Man embodies the negative aspects of Two: division, separation, alienation, antagonism.

13. Death (10 + 3. Cf. Three) Death is thirteenth in all the old trump lists. While 13 is considered ominous in our culture, the connotation is far from universal. Oddly, historians have yet to trace the unluckiness of 13 back before the invention of the Tarot. In the current schema, Death would embody aspects of Three that compare and contrast with those of the third trump. Whereas the Empress completes conception or gestation, Death completes decline or mortality. In Nature, life and death are inseparable.¹³

14. Temperance (10 + 4. Cf. Four) Among Hermetists, the number Four strongly recalls the Empedoclean elements of matter. The fourth trump beyond the Decad could symbolize a transformation of the elements. Adjustments of the elements in the human body were credited with healing. The Temperance card could also symbolize reincarnation. At least one Theosophical source says that the Greeks regarded 14 as the number of reincarnation.¹⁴ The Pythagorean term for transmigration was μεταγγισμὸς, the pouring of water from one vessel (ἄγγος) to another.¹⁵

The Two Lower Septenaries

I pause at this point to examine the first 14 trumps as a group, for this is the assortment that I take to have constituted the first stage of the Tarot's development.

The reader may have noticed that I have been blending two approaches to number symbolism. Each number can be taken independently, each being a separate archetype. We have examined Unity, Duality, Triplicity, etc. Such paradigms need not be the same as First, Second, Third, etc. These are not independent archetypes but are ordinal positions, as in a sequence or a hierarchy. A sequence is implicit in the development of One as the point, Two as the line, Three as the plane, Four as the solid. If we group the trumps as two Septenaries, we can see an embedded sequence that is symmetrically balanced.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

The symbolism of Three, Six, and Nine form a traditional sequence: they are, respectively, the First, Second, and Third “Completion.” Three contains “beginning, middle, and end” and relates to the completeness of the soul and “Gestation” (cf. the Empress). Six is a perfect number and relates to love and marriage (cf. Love). Nine concludes the sequence of single-digit numbers and relates to complete development (cf. the Hermit). In the above diagram, the Tarot designers seem to have added Thirteen (cf. Death) as another number of completion. Thirteen, as I said, can be perceived as Three on a different level. The sequence of trumps as “Completions”—Gestation, Adolescence, Old Age, and Death—strongly suggest a “soul journey.”

Temperance, especially as a disguised allegory of Reincarnation, or at least Transcendence, hints at something positive after Death.

If I am correct in detecting this nucleus of 14 trumps in the Tarot’s development, we have a strong argument against a cabalistic interpretation of them. That requires all 22 trump allegories so as to coordinate with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Had cabalists designed the first Tarot, they would not have stopped at a sequence of 14, for it falls far short of the number that they revere.

Pythagoreanism is sufficient to explain the numbers for the trumps. I have emphasized the importance of the Decad. Also important is the Tetrad (1, 2, 3, 4). The number Four can be represented as the tetractys, a pyramid of dots arranged in rows of one, two, three, and four. The tetractys has *four* dots along each side; the total quantity of dots is *ten*. The tetractys visually demonstrates that $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$. Pythagoreans sought hidden relationships between Ten and Four. The first 14 trumps satisfy the Decad plus an additional Tetrad (11, 12, 13, 14).

The Highest Septenary

Here we resume our usual formulae so as to interpret trumps 15 to 21.

15. Devil (10 + 5. Cf. Five) The fifth trump personifies universal blessings. The fifteenth trump personifies universal testing.

16. Tower (10 + 6. Cf. Six) The sixth trump illustrates perfection, agreeably attained. The sixteenth trump illustrates perfection, disagreeably attained.

17. Star (10 + 7. Cf. Seven) The Chariot embodies the soul as it descends to its work on earth. The Star embodies the soul as it ascends to its repose in heaven.

18. Moon (10 + 8. Cf. Eight) Eight, usually a number of balance and structure, is well suited to Justice. Eighteen apparently derives its symbolism from a less attractive Eight. It can be unfortunate because it exceeds the sanctity of Seven but falls short of the completeness of Nine. In ancient times, Eight meant “untimely birth.” In folk belief, a child’s birth in the eighth month of gestation is more risky than in the seventh. I regard the Moon in the *T de M* as somewhat sinister. The shadowy landscape and the fluctuating crescent bespeak uncertainty—or worse.

19. Sun (10 + 9. Cf. Nine) While the Hermit is at the close of the soul’s terrestrial life, the Sun is at the close of the soul’s celestial life.

20. Angel (10 + 10. Cf. Ten) Trump Ten expresses mundane changes. Trump Twenty expresses miraculous changes.

21. World (10 + 11 and 10 + 10 + 1. Cf. Eleven and One) By the present system, this trump should link with One and Eleven. The Juggler supports the soul as it embarks for earth; Fortitude supports the soul in the midst of its earthly journey; the World supports the soul in its reunion with the World Soul. Each of these cards, in its own domain, embodies Unity.

For the creators of the Tarot, numerals on the trumps would have been unnecessary. Numerals are indeed absent from most Renaissance trumps. The trump subjects themselves were the personifications of numbers.

The Virtues among the Two Lower Septenaries

The cards in the previous diagram can receive different emphases.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

Here, the boldface numbers denote Virtues. They obey a symmetrical layout. Also, the Virtues appear in a periodic sequence. I have not found any remarks on this orderliness, except for Internet chatter in which someone usurped my 1998 presentation to the International Playing-Card Society.¹⁶ I have assumed that trumps Two and Five are in fact meant to be Virtues. I have already asserted that they are closely related and that trump Two is Prudence. She is one of the Platonic Virtues.

Plato brilliantly analyzed that the soul has three parts: rational, spirited, and appetitive. He located each in a vital part of the body, respectively, the brain, the heart, and the abdomen. Plato extended this model to his version of the best society, in which citizens would contribute their natural talents. The lowest class—with its farmers, artisans, and peasants—would sustain the state as the appetite serves to sustain the body. The warriors, with their spirited nature, would defend the state. The philosophers, being the most clear-headed, would control the government. Plato also derives an entire theory of psychology from the mixture of the three parts of the soul in every individual. From the brain's rationality comes the Virtue of Prudence (Wisdom, Reason); from the exercise of the

spirit comes Fortitude (Strength, Courage); from control of the appetite comes Temperance (Restraint, Moderation). When all of these Virtues are in the right proportion, they produce Justice. The leader of Plato's government would be a philosopher who demonstrates a balance of the three soul-centered Virtues and who is therefore just. The four Virtues together became known as the Platonic Virtues. Also part of human psychology are the vices opposed to the Virtues.

An abundance of sources preserved the Platonic Virtues (sometimes called "Cardinal," "Natural," and "Civic"). The Pythagoreans credit their founder with the earliest discussions of those virtues. Considering merely the authors whom we have met in this survey, the Platonic Virtues are prominent in the writings of Cicero, Apuleius, Macrobius, and are mentioned by Martianus Capella and even the astrologer Firmicus Maternus. The Cardinal Virtues were of pagan origin, but a commentary by St. Ambrose (340?–397) legitimized them for Christians.

The Middle Ages combined the Platonic Virtues with the three Theological Virtues—Faith, Hope, Charity—cited by St. Paul (I Corinthians 13:13). The Seven Virtues are personified widely in Christian art, literature, and rhetoric. Artists gradually endowed the Virtues with identifying attributes. The quantity of seven was attractive, for it could coordinate with other symbolic septenaries. However, the artist sometimes required equal divisions of images and therefore would conscript an eighth Virtue, frequently Humility. Artists always retained some flexibility in the grouping of Virtues. The Cardinal Virtues in the Tarot obey a classical order. Cicero listed Prudence, Justice, Strength, and Temperance in his *De Inventione*. Thomas Aquinas (1225?–1274) followed this order in structuring his entire *Summa Theologica*.

Among the initial 14 trumps in the *T de M*, I perceive the four Cardinal Virtues plus a fifth Virtue in the Pope. He is best seen as Beatitude. He raises his hand in a gesture of spiritual blessing. The presence of Beatitude in the Tarot leads us directly to Apuleius, who aspired to be a Platonist philosopher. In his treatise *De Platone et Eius Dogmate* (*On Plato and His Doctrine*), Apuleius uses the Platonic Virtues to launch a chapter on morality (book II). He discusses them with ample detail (and distressing confusion). He interlards his chapter with allusions to Beatitude. A Renaissance scholar, reading Apuleius's philosophy and sifting it for

concepts to be visualized as Tarot cards, would not have hesitated to install a beatific Pope as a partner for the prudent Popess. They have been given the appearance of Virtues; they have been given appropriate numbers, and their numbers add up to the sacred Seven. In Latin, the word for Prudence (*Prudentia*) is feminine, while Apuleius's word for Beatitude (*Beatificus*) is masculine.

The Virtues in the Highest Septenaries

The periodicity of Virtues apparently continues throughout the trump hierarchy. This would be another indication that the designers who completed the Tarot were well informed about its original symbolism. If, in observing the periodic sequence of Virtues, we skip two cards after Temperance, we arrive at the Star. The *Hieroglyphica* says that a star emblem symbolizes Providence and *Heimarmene*, meaning Destiny, Fate, or Fortune. Platonist philosophers sometimes discussed the interactions of Providence and *Heimarmene*. I believe that Providence is the Virtue personified in the star-maiden of the *T de M*. Fate was understood to enforce conditions that were predestined; but stronger than Fate or Fortune was Providence. That Virtue guarantees that Fate itself will not interfere with the good and gracious intentions of God. "Providence" derives from the Latin *providere*, "to see ahead." Like Fate, Providence looks to the future. Providence entails God's *foresight* (looking ahead). His Providence has stored away various resources and will release them for our purposes at crucial moments. God will provide (cf. *providere*). This virtue is well suited to the stars, whose charts inform us about future needs. This easily connects with the Star in the *T de M*. The woman is clearly a celestial being who dispenses influences onto the earth. The *Hieroglyphica* says that the celestial bodies receive and transmit divine Providence.

Proceeding beyond the Star, my formula for Virtues brings us to the Angel of Judgment. The card certainly looks righteous enough. Apuleius is again the best source, for, in his treatise on Platonism, he rhapsodizes about the Virtue of Sagacity. The perfect sage is beyond the opinions of others and beyond his old biases, fears, and passions. We could interpret Sagacity as a Virtue and the culmination of all other Virtues. By the

exercise of justice, piety, and wisdom, the sage will become godlike. He “will suddenly become perfect, that is, will suddenly arrive at the limits of past and future, and will become, in effect, atemporal.”¹⁷ This transformation could be the very essence of the Judgment card.

For careful and informative discussions of Apuleius’s Platonism, refer to John Dillon¹⁸ and to Stephen Gersh.¹⁹

The Tarot has seven Virtues but not of the Christian kind. The trumps enroll the four Virtues that Plato taught, plus the three highest Virtues that Apuleius taught: Beatitude, Providence, Sagacity.

NUMBERS AGAIN

The Tarot’s Virtues, now that we have identified all of them as such, can be seen to possess further number symbolism.

Prudence = Popess (trump 2). As the second trump, the Popess has the connotation of Thought, compatible with the rational Virtue. In the Platonist view, God is the supreme Mind. His first act was to think. When the thinker had a thought, One produced Two.

Beatitude = Pope (trump 5). I previously explained the card’s number on the basis of the cross. The symbolism of the Pope and the cross are intrinsically Christian, of course. Furthermore, five-pointed stars were Pythagorean amulets for protection and blessing, and they were Christianized by calling the star “the Seal of the Holy Spirit.”

Justice = Justice (trump 8). Remember the balance of the “evenly even” number. According to Martianus Capella, Eight is sacred to Thoth. That god records each soul’s weight as it registers in the balances (like the balances of Justice) that stand in the Judgment Hall of Osiris.

Fortitude = Strength (trump 11). In the Easter story, Jesus is betrayed by Judas, one of the twelve Apostles. All the others remain loyal, despite the risk of punishment; so the number 11 can symbolize “constancy, endurance.”

Temperance = Temperance (trump 14). The Chariot prompted us to view Seven as the number of the soul incarnate. If the Tarot’s Temperance represents the exact moment of the soul’s transmigration, then the two

vessels could symbolize two states of metempsychosis, the old and the new. Conveniently, $7 + 7 = 14$.

Providence = Star (trump 17). I repeat, Seven symbolizes the soul's entry into the mortal body. Seven is embedded in the number Seventeen. At this level, the soul enters into its celestial body. Macrobius makes clear that ascended souls continue life as stars. Thus, the soul is *provided* with its stellar form; and, as a star, it transmits *provisions* to the souls still on Earth.

Perfect Sagacity = Angel of Judgment (trump 20). If Ten is transformation at a low level, twice Ten must be transformation at a high level, presumably the spiritual level. St. Paul says that on Judgment Day, the trumpet will sound and we will be transformed "in the twinkling of an eye" (I Cor. 15:51). Compare this with the sudden perfection that Apuleius promises to the true sage.

6

Astral Archetypes



HERMETIC ASTROLOGY

Hermetic astrology bears traces of the entire evolution of the art. It was an effort of international scope. The ancient Mesopotamians diligently designed and refined methods for consulting oracles. The priests codified the zodiac and included the planets among many types of celestial omens (eclipses, comets, clouds, winds, lightning). These were dutifully cataloged; cycles and their meanings were duly noted. However, the exact positions and relations among the planets were not systematically charted until stargazing was adopted by the Greeks, who possessed the necessary mathematics. The Egyptians were noted for their chronometry, namely the annual cycle of 12 equal months and the daily cycle of 24 hours. The latter were condensed into the 12 “houses” in the horoscope chart used by astrologers.

SCHOEN’S WOODCUT

[Figure 6.1](#) is a woodcut print, attributed to Erhard Schoen (ca. 1491–1542). The central sphere contains our planet with four elements implied: a river crosses the land; a forest fire mounts to the sky. Surrounding the terrestrial sphere are the seven classical planets as deities. The larger rings contain the zodiac and the astrological houses. The latter govern universal

categories of human experience: health, partnerships, death, faith, etc. The houses form a framework through which the planets and the zodiac regularly rotate. When an artist wished to represent planetary deities or zodiacal signs, he usually followed visual or textual formulas. No standard patterns evolved for visualizing the astrological houses. Schoen has exercised his own creativity and has arrived at expressive images. Some of them resemble Tarot trumps, which modern authors have noted.¹ I do not think that the printmaker, working in Germany ca. 1515, can have known anything about the trumps' esoterism, by then nearly forgotten even in their native Italy. The artist used international symbols for the vagaries of life: the wedded couple, the skeletal death, the pope, the emperor, the wheel of Fortune. The Tarot trumps meet the same exoteric demands. In effect, the woodcut and the Tarot trumps use the same visual language. Furthermore, by my reckoning, both sets of images have a common ancestor: Egyptian horoscopes.

MARCUS MANILIUS

Marcus Manilius (fl. first century) wrote the *Astronomica*, a lengthy astrological text in five "books." They are detailed but are nevertheless insufficient for constructing an entire horoscope. Manilius was actually interested in two other matters: astrology's philosophical basis (Stoicism, in this case) and the challenge of rendering technical information in elegant verse (Latin hexameters). To this extent, his poetry succeeds, although some of it may not have been carried through to its final draft.

Nothing is known of Manilius's life, except for the meager clues in his writing. From his knowledge of Greek terms and Greek literature, we can infer a good education. He probably aspired to acceptance in the highest levels of Roman society. He began writing the *Astronomica* during the last days of Augustus and finished it during the reign of Tiberius. Both emperors were devotees of astrology, which therefore became fashionable. Yet Manilius had slight influence on other Roman authors. His most recent translator, G. P. Goold, lists six possibilities.² Goold also assumes that the *Astronomica* was available to Julius Firmicus Maternus, a Roman

astrologer who wrote the *Mathesis*, a prose manual begun in 334. Firmicus concludes with a tabulation of the *paranatellonta*, here meaning the nonzodiacal stars and constellations that rise with particular degrees of the ecliptic. His discussion is comparable to that of Manilius. Manilius claims to be the first Roman to versify about astrology, and Firmicus claims to be the first Roman to write a comprehensive textbook for astrologers. Perhaps Firmicus was drawing a fine distinction, or perhaps he was unaware of Manilius. In the latter case, the similarities in their texts would suggest a mutual source, now lost, that neither author bothered to name. Firmicus elsewhere names Egyptian authorities. The knowledge transmitted by Manilius and Firmicus is older than the first century and was synthesized in Egypt, probably Hellenistic Alexandria.

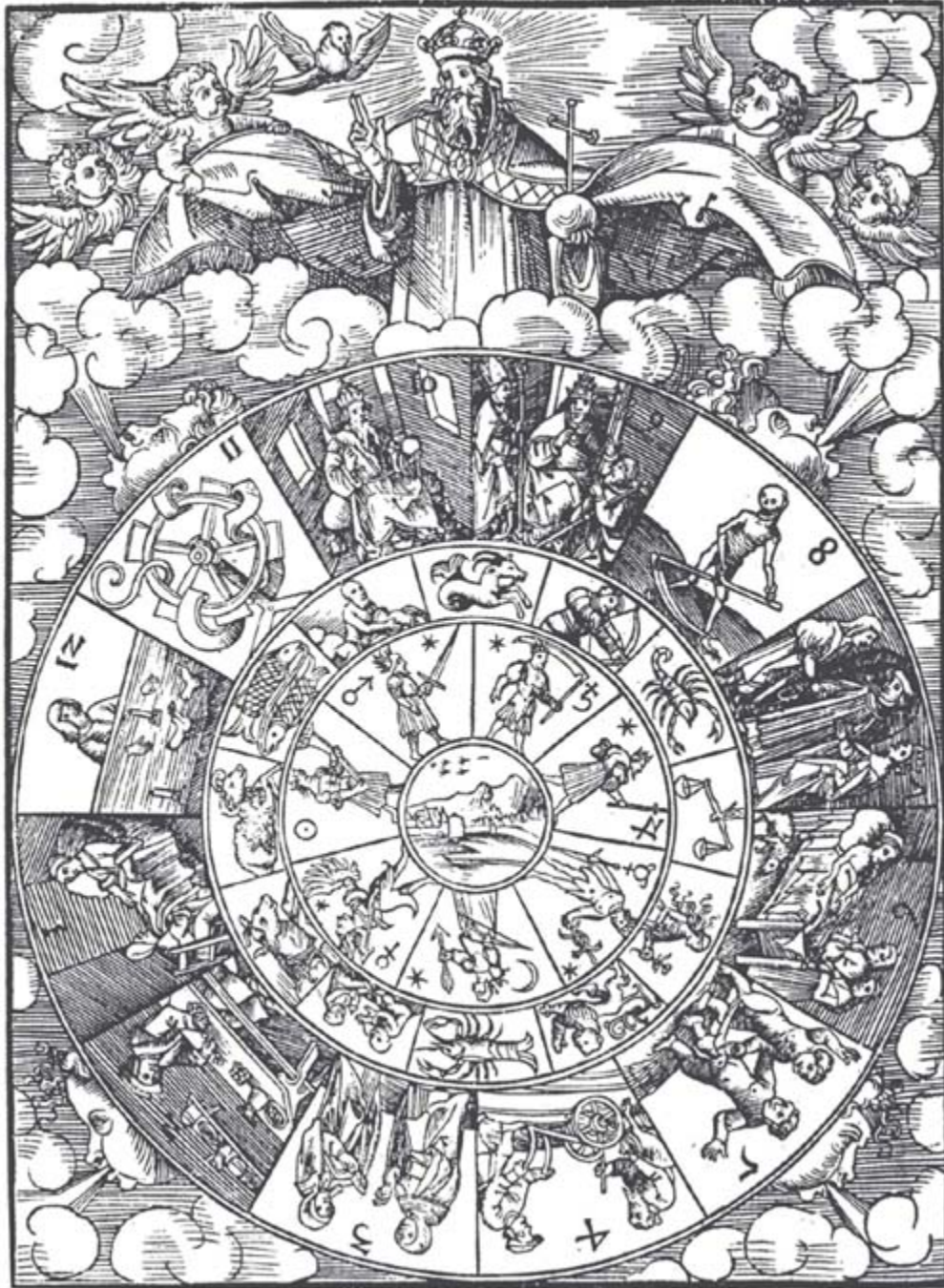


Figure 6.1. Astrological “sphaera,” woodcut attributed to Erhard Schoen. (From Leonhard Reymann, *Nativitätskalender*, Nürnberg, 1515.)

Manilius’s *Astronomica* commanded no widespread interest until the advent of the humanists. In the fifteenth century, their search for ancient manuscripts became an obsession. One of the most famous hunters was Poggio Bracciolini, a Florentine scholar and antiquarian. He worked as a

secretary in the papal curia but spent his leisure time rummaging in old libraries for uncatalogued antiquities. In 1414, Bracciolini attended the Council of Constance in the entourage of John XXIII, later declared anti-pope. Bracciolini was in new territory and wasted no time in tracking down the monastic libraries of Switzerland and Swabia. He found a degraded copy of the *Astronomica*. In a letter of 1417, Francesco Barbaro congratulated Bracciolini on his discovery. In the autumn of 1417 or the spring of 1418, Bracciolini replied.³

Thank you for the twenty florins which you gave to Matthaeus, for I am now free of debt, and so that I may begin to make some sort of return, I am sending you by the priest Brandinus Pisanus, who belongs to Cardinal Pisanus' household, Silius Italicus, five books of Statius' *Silvae* and M. Manilius the astronomer. The man who copied the books was the most ignorant of living men; one needs to use divination, not reading itself, and so it is very important that they be copied by a scholar.

Manilius must have received renewed attention from scholars. Among visual artists, however, the text of his *Astronomica* was first employed by the Tarot illustrators.

THE LOTS OF MARCUS MANILIUS

Western astrologers now routinely use only one or two lots: the Part of Fortune and the Part of Spirit (or Demon). The Part of Fortune indicates the native's wealth, both earned and inherited. To locate its position in the horoscope, begin at the Ascendant. Subtract the arc of the sun from the arc of the moon. Cast the resulting arc from the Ascendant. The other endpoint marks the lot. The Part of Spirit reveals the native's spiritual constitution: subtract the arc of the moon from the arc of the sun, and cast the resulting arc from the Ascendant. By some accounts, these are the formulas for a daytime chart. For a nighttime chart, the Part of Fortune becomes the Part of Spirit and *vice versa*.

Muslim astrologers calculated dozens of lots. A great abundance is possible because the above formulas can be varied by inserting the names of planets and other significant points in place of the sun, the moon, and the Ascendant. These specialized lots derive their meanings from the participating planets. For instance, the lot of victory involves Jupiter; the lot of love involves Venus; the lot of boldness involves Mars. These lots are called the Arabian points or parts. However, they originated not in Arabia but in Hellenistic Egypt.

In the *Astronomica*, Manilius specifies 12 lots, which he calls *sortes* (in Latin) and *athla* (in Greek). They have an unusual arrangement. They form a wheel. It turns, but the lots keep their relative positions in the circular array ([figure 6.2](#)). Fortune claims the first position, determined by the usual formula based on the lunar arc diminished by the solar arc. The other lots need no computations but follow in sequence: War, Civil Actions, Law, Marriage, Duration of Support, Risk, Reputation, Parenthood, Character, Health, Effort. (Goold gives slightly different themes: Manilius offers a range of possibilities.) These lots provide 12 compartments for coordination with the zodiac and the planets.



THE LOTS OF MARCUS MANILIUS

Figure 6.2. The circle of “lots” as given by Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica*, III, 43–159.

Trumps as Lots

Lot 1 (*Fortuna*) = Wheel. Manilius says that *Fortuna* dictates the essentials of one’s home. The Tarot exploits a visual factor: Fortune is identified by her globe or wheel, and the tenth trump is manifestly the Wheel of Fortune.

Lot 2 (militarism, foreign involvement) = Chariot. The Steele Sermon lists the Chariot as *lo caro triumphale* (the triumphal car). This indicates a car in a celebratory procession. In the Renaissance, triumphal parades could mark many happy occasions, such as holidays, royal welcomes, weddings, anniversaries, and births. However, the model was the ancient Roman triumph, the public ceremony in which a victorious general was welcomed into the capitol. The happy occasion was specifically a success

in a foreign war. This was well known in the Renaissance. In 1442, René of Anjou, King of Naples, was expelled by Alfonso of Aragon. The new king is depicted in a relief sculpture over the archway of Naples's Castel Nuovo: he rides in a square chariot similar to that in the *Tarot de Marseille*.

Lot 3 (rewards for devotion, friendship, trust, civility?) = Pope. Manilius cites "civil actions." Does that relate to government, as in "civil war," or to courtesy, as in "civil treatment"? The latter accords with Manilius's further themes: faith, friendly ties, rewards for devotion. He doesn't say *religious* faith or devotion, but the card designer could have preferred religiosity, if only as something easily illustrated. A papal figure further allowed the Renaissance designer to accommodate Manilius's statement that this lot, like Lot 2, is involved in "a kind of warfare." In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the popes supported numerous wars.

Lot 4 (law, disputes) = Hanged Man. This figure conforms to a Renaissance "shame painting." As Moakley established, the likenesses of lawbreakers, shown strung up by their feet, were displayed in public.

Lot 5 (marriages, partnerships) = Love. The lovers in the *T de M* have been identified as Hercules and the partner whom he must choose as his lifelong companion. These lots in the first half of Manilius's list would seem to accentuate the negative. So rather than a romantic view of love, the *T de M* emphasizes uncertainty and suspense.

Lot 6 (plenitude, the degree and duration of support) = Death. Here I must raise a question. Did the Tarot's authors read Manilius's "duration of support" as merely "duration," emphasizing the end of a process? That would explain the finality expressed by Death. I see a possible reference to plenitude. The specter is the Lord of the Underworld who rules the souls of the dead, but also all the products of the earth, such as orchards and crops. He suggests both Pluto (king of Hades) and Plutus (god of wealth). The scythe symbolizes the fell swoop of Death but also, in this case, the reaping of a plentiful harvest. That imagery will be suitable in the next chapter, too.

Lot 7 (risk) = Juggler. For this function, Manilius uses the term *periculum*, which his modern translator renders as “danger.” It also could be “risk, test,” even “experiment.” I cannot resist placing here the image of the Juggler as the demon from whom we each received our random lot in life. This place is especially appropriate for him because of his partnership with the Part of Fortune. When other astrologers calculate the Part of the Demon, they transpose the degrees for the sun and the moon as they are given for the Part of Fortune. In using Manilius’s lots, we can observe another symmetry: Lot 1, *Fortuna*, can stand directly opposite Lot 7, the *Demon*.

Lot 8 (reputation, nobility) = Emperor. Many of these lots can be compared with certain “houses” illustrated in the woodcut of 1515 ([figure 6.1](#)). It shows the houses as we know them today. The place of reputation and great accomplishment is House 10, appropriately at the zenith of the chart. The occupant shown in the woodcut is an imperial figure. In some horoscopes, indeed, the house is called *imperium* (the Romans’ term for the right to rule).

Lot 9 (parenthood) = Empress. The primary role of an empress is to continue the dynasty by bearing and rearing heirs. From the Pythagorean point of view, she is “Becoming” and “Generation.” We have seen that the vulture is the hieroglyph for “motherhood.” In the *T de M*, the vulture cleverly becomes a heraldic device on the Empress’s shield. She holds it on her knee. The Latin for “knee” is *genu*, which, in this case, could be a pun on “Generation.” The heraldry is *genealogical*; that word is legitimately related to “Generation.”

Lot 10 (character, conduct, family traditions) = Popess. As a personification of a moral force, the Popess is Prudence. As an astrological lot, the Popess personifies Prudence in its practical applications: self-discipline, good behavior, respect for inherited wisdom. That last quality agrees with the Popess’s book as a hieroglyph meaning “ancient heritage.”

Lot 11 (health, medicines: mixing and timing) = Temperance. The term “tempering” implies a mixing of elements. An entire theory of medicine was based on the belief that a person’s *temperament* was determined by the mixture of four bodily “humors,” each related to a different element. The words “temperance” and “temperament” can make a pun about “time” (*tempus* in Latin). For this reason, Renaissance personifications of Temperance sometimes balance clocks on their heads.

Lot 12 (efforts, gain) = Strength. This lot should be understood as physical strength but also psychological and spiritual strength, like the Virtue of Fortitude.

Two More Trumps

The quantity of lots may suggest that the first Tarot had 12 trumps. However, I find no historical evidence for such a thing. The first pack probably had 14 trumps, balancing the 14 cards in each suit. For this purpose, I think, the first Tarot included two more personifications:

***Horoscopos* = Hermit.** The exact degree of the Ascendant was anciently called the *Horoscopos*, “Hour Marker” (mentioned frequently in the *Astronomica*). The *Hieroglyphica* has a *Horoscopos* who is a priestly astrologer. The corresponding trump would be the old man with the hourglass. He observes the precise time. The Hermit is trump Nine in the *T de M*. Among numerologists, Nine is sometimes called “the horizon,” because it stands at the upper limit of the sequence of single digits. The Ascendant lies on the eastern horizon.

Midheaven = Justice. This point, according to Manilius, confers “the power to dispense justice in the courts, to bring the world under the rule of law, to make alliances with foreign nations on one’s own terms.”⁴ The corresponding trump must be Justice. As the Midheaven, she would stand between the eastern and western halves of the horoscope. The position is nicely symbolized by the evenness of her trump number, Eight, and by the

symmetry of her balanced scales. The “middle way” is symbolized by the concentric circles on the crown of Justice in the *T de M*.

THE TEMPLES OF MARCUS MANILIUS

A later stage in the Tarot’s development required seven more allegories: Devil, Tower, Star, Moon, Sun, Angel, World. I find that they all have astrological meanings, again based on the *Astronomica*.

In the second section of the *Astronomica*, Manilius describes another horoscope circle that has twelve divisions, *templa* (“temples, sacred precincts, open areas”). They are variations on the divisions that other ancient authors called “places” (Greek *topoi*, Latin *loci*). Manilius indeed sometimes uses that Latin term. In modern astrology, these places are the “houses” that we have seen in [figure 6.1](#). Unlike the rotating lots, which I previously explained, the houses/places/temples form a circle that is immobile. House One is always at the Ascendant. This circle is continuously traversed by the inhabitants of the sky: zodiacal signs, planets, lots, and other celestial powers, each contributing to the symbolism.

Manilius somewhat contradicts other astrologers when he cites the categories for his temples. Seven of them are the preferred residences of particular planets (including sun and moon). Manilius again sometimes disagrees with other ancient authorities. He has intriguing names for the temples.

Place	Theme	Occupant
Typical House 1 (Ascendant):	Life, constitution	Mercury
Manilius’s Temple 1 (Ascendant):	Children	Mercury
Typical House 2:	Resources, means	-----
Manilius’s Temple 2 (Throne of	Fear of neglect	-----

Typhon):

Typical House 3:	Brothers	Moon
Manilius's Temple 3 (Goddess):	Brothers	Moon
Typical House 4:	Parents	-----
Manilius's Temple 4 (<i>Demonium</i>):	Parents	Saturn
Typical House 5:	Children	Venus
Manilius's Temple 5 (<i>Demonie</i>):	Acceptance of work	-----
Typical House 6:	Health	Mars
Manilius's Temple 6 (Portal of Toil):	Falling into evil	Mars [neglected by Manilius]
Typical House 7:	Marriage	-----
Manilius's Temple 7 (Gate of Dis):	Manner of death	-----
Typical House 8:	Manner of death	-----
Manilius's Temple 8 (Throne of Typhon):	Fear of capture	-----
Typical House 9:	Travels, religion	Sun
Manilius's Temple 9 (God):	Health	Sun
Typical House 10:	Honors, preferments	-----
Manilius's Temple 10 (Fortune):	Marriage, fertility	Venus
Typical House 11:	Friendships	Jupiter
Manilius's Temple 11 (Glad	Achievement	Jupiter

Fortune):

Typical House 12: Enemies, Saturn
misfortunes

Manilius's Temple 12 (Portal of Climbing to evil -----
Toil):

TRUMPS AS “REJOICING” PLANETS

Now we need to attend more closely to those seven classical planets as they reside in the most congenial temples. Manilius seems not to have had a special term for this relationship. As a convenience, we might say that planets thus positioned are in their “joy,” since this is the term used by later authors when they refer to the planets in the appropriate houses. The Tarot’s higher trumps (15–21) apparently represent the planets in their respective “joys.” Much of the imagery derives from the names and functions of the temples as Manilius gives them.

While Manilius is the guide to the conceptual matter at this level in the Tarot, the visualizations follow other guides as well, especially astrological talismans and “the Children of the Planets.” The latter program was common in Renaissance paintings and prints. The “children” are not really juveniles but are adults whose traits and talents are supposedly engendered by planetary influences. In the conventional format, the artist depicts each deity (usually elevated on a cloud or celestial car) presiding over a group of mortals, who sometimes populate an extensive landscape (figure 6.3). The personalities of the “children” conform to ancient mythology about the planetary deities. For example, venereal lovers appear with Venus, martial combatants with Mars, saturnine misanthropes with Saturn.

Devil = Saturn (Greater Infortune) in the temple of *Demonium* (apparently regarded as a devil). *Demonium* is the house of one’s parentage, and Saturn was the evil father of the Olympian deities. He was a god of agriculture. In classical art, he typically carries a *falx*, a pruning hook (figure 6.4). It is transformed into a sickle or scythe when he appears

in the Middle Ages and Renaissance (figure 6.5). Something of this type was the inspiration for the blades or hooks in the Devil trump.



Figure 6.3. Illustration of the “Children of the Planets,” woodcut, German, ca. 1490.

Tower = Mars (fiery god) **in the Portal of Toil** (or Suffering). The burning tower is a standard feature in “the Children of the Planets” where Mars presides over a landscape incinerated by war (figure 6.6).

Star = Venus (watery goddess) **in the place of Fortune** (compare Venus as Lesser Fortune). In “the Children of the Planets,” the beneficiaries of Venus are shown drinking and bathing or swimming in the nude. Yet, as Paul Huson notes, the nude in the Star card is someone more otherworldly.⁵ In the early example in the Cary sheet (Beinecke Library,

Yale), stars appear in the sky, but one star appears on the figure's shoulder (figure 6.7). Huson has perceived the Star card as the Morning Star. He cites a text that personifies the Morning Star as a youth bearing a torch and scattering dew from an urn.⁶ This is an ancient visualization. (I find it embossed on the emperor's breastplate for the "Augustus of Prima Porta," a Roman sculpture now in the Vatican.) Of course, the morning star is really a planet, namely Venus. In this feminine guise, she still was said to dispense dew. Perhaps this context explains why the Tarot gives her two urns. Venus is the morning star and the evening star, too (figure 6.8). Pliny, a Roman encyclopedist of the first century, wrote that the planet Venus "is the cause of the birth of all things on earth; at both of its risings, it scatters a genital dew..."⁷



Figure 6.4. Saturn with pruning hook, drawing in the *Calendar of 354* (or *Calendar of Filocalus*). (Original: Vatican Library.)



Figure 6.5. Saturn with his scythe, woodcut. (From Sigismondo Fanti, *Triumpho di Fortuna*, Venice, 1526.)

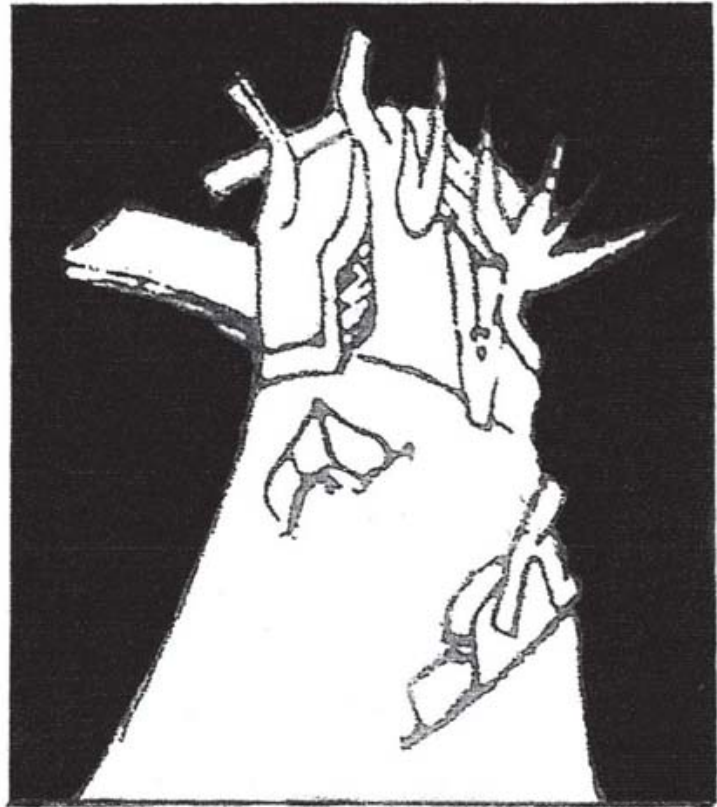
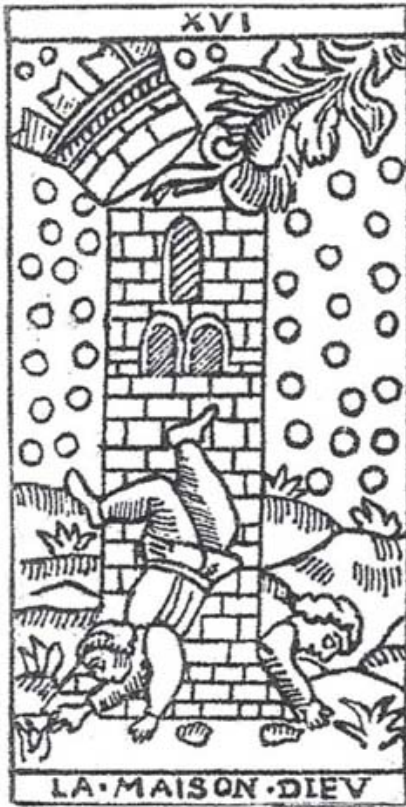


Figure 6.6. Tarot Tower (left) compared with burning building from the “Children of Mars” (detail of [figure 6.3](#)).



Figure 6.7. Star trump, from woodcut Tarot, detail of an uncut sheet, Milan, ca. 1480. (ITA sheet 3S, Cary Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT.)



Figure 6.8. Double Venus, woodcut (the letter V from Plutarch, *Opera*, Paris, 1584). [Note associations with fertility, water, and light, as in the Star card.]



Figure 6.9. Above: Cancer as the Moon's sign; wrestlers as "Children of the Sun" (details of [figure 6.3](#)). Below: The Moon trump and the Sun trump from the *Tarot de Marseille* (see [figure 0.1](#)).

Moon = Moon in the place of the goddess (alluding to the Moon herself). In "the Children of the Planets," the zodiacal signs appear along with the ruling deities. The Moon rules Cancer. In early prints, the crab can appear as a lobster or crayfish ([figure 6.9](#)). The same appears in the Moon of the *T de M*.



Figure 6.10. Mercury as psychopomp (Roman gem engraving). (Courtesy of Lehner, 1956; see bibliography.)

Sun = Sun in the place of the god (alluding to the Sun himself). The Sun engenders good health and agility. I feel certain that the two figures in the Sun of the *T de M* can be taken as the wrestlers typically included in “the Children of the Planets” ([figure 6.9](#)).

Angel = Mercury (soul guide) **in the Ascendant** (the *T de M* shows people ascending from their graves). Mercury is a messenger, which is the literal meaning of “angel.” Mercury, like the Greek Hermes, is a psychopomp, a guide of souls. The role is depicted in art, including engraved gems ([figure 6.10](#)). Mercury can be a trumpeter.⁸ Negligent

artists developed a lengthy trumpet from the shepherds' flute, which Mercury is supposed to have invented.

World = Jupiter (Greater Fortune) **in the place of Glad Fortune**. Recall the option of regarding the World as “God the Father” (cf. the “Steele Sermon”). He could be visualized as Jupiter, whose planet is fortunate. Fortune, in turn, can be visualized as a goddess like that in the World card (recall the World in [figures 0.1](#), [0.3](#), and [0.4](#)).

THE MAGICAL WORLD

The World trump, as we observed, has a complex iconography, but this is feasible for a Renaissance hieroglyph. In the *T de M*, the central figure is Isis/Fortuna (see the introduction). She holds a scepter and, sometimes, a pear-shaped object, possibly a purse but more probably an orb, poorly copied. In some editions of the *T de M*, the oval wreath is attenuated to form a frame called a mandorla, shaped thus: (). In Christian contexts, it encloses sacred figures such as Christ, the Virgin Mary, and God the Father. However, the mandorla was sometimes allotted to pagan figures, including Jupiter.⁹ He and his Greek equivalent, Zeus, lend other attributes to the World card of the *T de M*, as I will demonstrate forthwith.

The temple of Zeus at Olympia was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The sanctuary was dominated by the famous sculpture of Zeus constructed by Phidias (born ca. 500 BC). He adorned the effigy with a veneer of gold (representing the god's drapery, which extended from his waist to his ankles) and a veneer of ivory (representing the god's nude skin). The figure, about forty feet high, sat on a throne that surmounted a base, about twelve feet high. In his right hand, he held a statue of Nike, the winged goddess of victory. She, in turn, lifted a wreath, the reward for victors. In his left hand, Zeus held a staff topped with an eagle. A winged Victory (Nike) supported each of the throne's four legs. The precinct has been excavated, but it did not yield the sculpture of Zeus. At Rome, the temple of Jupiter was destroyed by fire and restored in 83 BC. The Romans modeled their new sculpture of Jupiter on the classical Zeus by

Phidias. This later sculpture has also disappeared. The Olympian Zeus survives in small depictions, as on Greek coins ([figure 6.11](#)), and from written accounts, as by Pausanius.¹⁰

The image of Olympian Zeus was taken into the repertoire of magicians. They needed descriptions of the gods so as to inscribe their images on talismans and thereby attract and control the gods' powers. In extravagant cases, the talismans were engraved gems, since the gems themselves were thought to have occult powers. Such talismans have been preserved, as have the lapidaries, the manuals that prescribe the images to be rendered by the gem engravers. In a lapidary compiled for Alphonso X, King of Castile and Leon (died 1284), we can consult the description for the talisman of Jupiter. A white stone should be engraved with a seated figure, wearing a crown and raising a hand; the four legs of the seat should each rest on the neck of a winged figure. This depends ultimately on Zeus at Olympia. However, illustrators of the text were not well informed ([figure 6.12](#)). The central figure raises both arms but holds nothing. His throne has been reduced to a bench, and the supporting Victories have become stereotyped angels.



Figure 6.11. Zeus at Olympia, after a coin from Elis, ca. AD 125. (Drawing from Seyffert, 1882; see bibliography.)

In Agrippa's printed compendium, we read, "With the appropriate [astrological] timing, they make another image of Jupiter, in a clear white stone, especially in crystal. And it was a nude man, crowned, having both his hands joined together and upraised, as if prayerfully beseeching something, sitting on a four-footed chair that is carried by four winged boys."¹¹ I am not sure whether all those elevated arms derived from the pose of Zeus, who raised a sculpture of Victory, or from the pose of Victory, who raised a laurel wreath.



Figure 6.12. Talisman of Jupiter, drawing after a lapidary of King Alfonso X (reigned 1252–84). (Drawing courtesy of Jean Seznec [Original: MS J-h-15, 16, fol. 102r, Biblioteca de San Lorenzo, Escorial, Madrid].)

In another variation, this talisman of Jupiter had become the World in the *T de M*. The winged boys (undoubtedly described as “cherubs” in some intervening text) have become St. John’s apocalyptic cherubim, also called tetramorphs (lion, bull, man, eagle). Those four “living creatures” are from St. John’s Book of Revelation 4:6–8 and 6:1–7. St. John was borrowing from the Book of Ezekiel 1:1–14. Ezekiel saw the radiant chariot of God supported by four creatures, each with the face of a man, a lion, a bull, and an eagle. Ezekiel’s vision, in turn, seems to have been synthesized from Middle Eastern *kerubim* and *lamassu* (sphinxes), now revealed by archaeologists. Monumental sculptures depict kerubs as supernatural lions and bulls, both having human heads and, sometimes, eagle wings. The region also produced other permutations: humans with eagle heads and wings, lion heads on flying eagles, eagle wings on striding lions. Europeans adopted the griffin and the minotaur. All these hybrids originated as Iranian or Mesopotamian allegories (possibly astrological but more probably meteorological, I think).

The biblical tetramorphs were surely meant to be guardians of the four corners of the universe. (These same creatures appear at the four corners of “Prima Causa” [First Cause] in one of the versions of the misnamed *Tarocchi di Mantegna*.) Orthodox Christians have taken the four living creatures to symbolize the four Gospel writers. For the Tarotist, those creatures could evoke Jupiter: he assumed precisely those forms in ancient astrology and mythology. He became an eagle in order to abduct Ganymede; a bull to rape Europa; a man to seduce Semele and others. Manilius associates Jupiter with Leo, the Lion.¹²



Figure 6.13. Winged Victory on a globe, classical bronze. (Drawing from Seyffert, 1882; see bibliography [Original: museum at Cassel].)

In the *T de M*, the tetramorphs can surround either the orthodox mandorla or a leafy oval, which I presume is a laurel wreath, symbolic of victory. The wreath could derive from the leafy crown of Zeus at Olympia, or, more probably, from the wreath grasped by the goddess Victory. Zeus supported her, like a trophy, in his right hand. In some ancient depictions of Victory, she stands on a sphere, that standard attribute of Fortuna. The ancient Romans, indeed, had honored a *Fortuna Victrix* ([figure 6.13](#)).



Figure 6.14. Talisman for good fortune, woodcut. (From *Le Petit Albert*, Cologne, 1722, in Grillot de Givry, 1929; see bibliography.)

This could have reinforced the identity of the card's central figure, whom I take to be Good Fortune.

The symbolism of Jupiter meets with that of Fortuna, complete with sphere, in a magical talisman (figure 6.14). This good luck charm is constructed on Thursday, for that day is sacred to Jupiter. Again, Jupiter is a fortunate planet and, as we remember, is called “the Greater Fortune.”

That dual nature, Jupiter/Fortuna, is found in Tarots other than the *T de M*. In the handcrafted Estense-Aragonese Tarot at Yale, a winged boy occupies Fortune's position—on a world globe (figure 6.15). He is

Ganymede, the favorite of Jupiter. Centered below the globe is an eagle, Jupiter in his raptorial form. I have dated this deck at ca. 1473.

We now have encountered a surfeit of Fortunes. Reflecting back on the category of astrology in the Tarot, we have two different Fortunes in two different trumps. The Tarot's Wheel of Fortune is Manilius's Lot of Fortune, representing an interplay between the moon and the sun. The Tarot's World is Jupiter as the Greater Fortune, rejoicing in Manilius's Temple of Glad Fortune. We have also noted Venus as the Lesser Fortune. As if all that were not enough, some astrologers know House Five as "Good Fortune" and House Six as "Bad Fortune." In Schoen's woodcut of 1515 ([figure 6.1](#)), the Wheel of Fortune occupies House Eleven. This abundance of Fortunes can be traced to astrology in ancient Egypt, but that is a story for another time.



Figure 6.15. Author's drawing of the World trump showing Ganymede and Jupiter's eagle, handcrafted, Italian, ca. 1473. (Original: ITA 103, Cary Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, New Haven, CT.)

This summary may assist the Tarotist. In mystical Platonism, the World Soul can be both Fortuna (Isis) and Jupiter (Zeus). In the World card of the *T de M*, the woman can be Fortuna and/or the Isis of the Egyptian pantheon. At the same time, the card's tetramorphs can be the Jupiter of the Greco-Roman pantheon and/or the Greater Fortune of the *Astronomica*. This composite identity—mythological and astrological—can be found in Jupiter's magical talismans.

TALISMANS THROUGHOUT THE TOP SEVEN TRUMPS

The World card is strongly tied to talismanic magic. We have departed the realm of astrology and have entered the realm of astrolatry (communication with celestial powers as though they were sentient beings). That category is likely to include all the trumps in the highest septenary (15–21).

In magical ceremonies, the planetary symbols have four different manifestations: (1) the delineations on the talismans prescribed for summoning a planetary spirit or deity, (2) the costume of the conjurer, (3) the ingredients manipulated in the ritual, (4) the spirit's apparition. Agrippa gives details in his three books of *Occult Philosophy* (1531, 1533). The anonymous *Fourth Book* supplements Agrippa's imagery. Both authors are in the tradition of the *Picatrix*.

SATURN = Devil. The *Picatrix* describes rituals in which the offerings to Saturn include dead bats and black goats. The Devil in the *T de M* exhibits the wings of a bat and, possibly, the face and ears of a goat or stag. All those animals were considered saturnine. Both the *Picatrix* and Agrippa cite three different saturnine spirits carrying a sickle or scythe, which is comparable to the hook brandished by the Devil in the *T de M*.

JUPITER = World. The *Picatrix* adds to our fund of variations on the Olympian Zeus (Jupiter), which I have linked to the Tarot's World.¹³

Carve a picture of a man sitting on a chair with four legs and was [*sic*; read: “wearing” or “he has”] a crown on his head. Each one of the chair’s legs is lying on the neck of a standing man. All these men have wings. The man on the chair is raising his hand praying to Allah. Carve this picture on a white onyx stone...

The *Picatrix* recommends this talisman for wealth and prestige. We have seen that the winged men evolved out of classical Victories and evolved into the Tarot’s cherubim—man, lion, bull, eagle—under the influence of the biblical Book of Revelation. Agrippa describes a different mutation that is almost comical: for a religious and glorious life, we can evoke a “son of Jupiter” who materializes as a man with the head of a lion or a ram (*sic*; read: “bull”) and eagle feet.¹⁴ The *Picatrix* gives us a spirit with a lion’s head and a bird’s feet.

MARS = Tower. The *Picatrix* promises that Mars will appear as a red spirit that looks like a torch of fire. It will pause at an offering, then smell it, then burn it.¹⁵

SUN = Sun trump. The card shows two figures (wrestlers, I say) reaching toward each other. The *Picatrix* knows of a talisman in which “the sun is symbolized by a standing man stretching his hand as if he wants to shake the hand of the person next to him.”¹⁶

VENUS = the Star. Muslim modesty deters the *Picatrix* from presenting Venus in the nude, as she is typically shown. Her conjurer is told to dress in white and to wear pearls and jewelry. The conjurer should possess two vessels, one for wine and one for perfume.¹⁷

MERCURY = the Angel. As I previously said, Mercury and the Angel are both supernatural messengers. For Mercury’s talisman, the *Picatrix* describes a figure with outstretched wings.¹⁸ Mercury’s other belongings here—rooster, rod, clay pot—do not appear in the *T de M*.¹⁹

MOON = the Moon trump. Many of the lunar talismans in the *Picatrix*, not surprisingly, include a crescent in their inscriptions. The environments for the rituals typically are watery settings.²⁰ They recall the Tarot's Moon.

Symbologists will have recognized that much of the talismanic imagery derives from the classical mythology of the gods and goddesses, albeit distorted in many instances. Here we have seen the pruning hook of Saturn, the animal avatars of Jupiter, the fieriness of Mars, the healthiness of Apollo, the sensuousness of Venus, the wings of Mercury, and the watery haunts of Diana. Diana, as goddess of the chase, was often depicted with hunting dogs. Therefore, she may have contributed the two canines in the Moon card. Oddly, however, I do not find dogs in the *Picatrix* tradition of talismans. I do not think that magic or astrology or mythology supplied the canines in the Moon card of the *T de M*. They probably translate into an ancient Latin phrase, *inter canem et lupem* (between the dog and the wolf). This is the transitional zone of twilight: the dog comes in at the end of the day, and the wolf goes out at the start of the night. "Between the dog and the wolf" connotes uncertainty and unclarity, even to the point of madness. The moon itself poses its own threat of lunacy (cf. Luna).

For the classical planets in their "joy," I have discussed them in an ancient order, from sluggish Saturn to the fast-paced moon. In the Tarot, the list seems more esoteric, ranging from trump 15 (Saturn, the Greater Infortune) to trump 21 (Jupiter, the Greater Fortune). In between, we pass through a gradation of spheres. Trump 16 (Mars, the Lesser Infortune) yields to something distinctly better, trump 17 (Venus, the Lesser Fortune). Then we detour through spheres that are neither Fortunes nor Infortunes. The Moon and Sun are the two "lights," lesser and greater. The Angel has Mercury's role, which could confer the very high status of the Divine Mind operating in the universe. Beyond that, we finally arrive at the World Soul, which the Hermetists identified as the god Jupiter and which the Tarot designer reasonably identified with Jupiter's planet in his Temple of Glad Fortune.

I am convinced that Manilius's *Astronomica*—with its "lots" and "joys"—provided ideas for all the trumps when they were created. A few

subsequent designers recognized astrology in the deck. When the Florentines created the *Minchiate*, their additional trumps included all the zodiacal signs. However, I doubt that anyone was still aware that the Tarot's astrology derived principally from the *Astronomica*.

THE FOOL AND ASTROLOGY

If pressed for an opinion about the Fool's astrological symbolism, I would cite the Lot of Basis. This lot is attractive primarily because its computation combines principal lots that I have already located in the Tarot. The Lot of Basis is determined by measuring the shortest arc between the Part of Fortune and the Part of Spirit.²¹ This measurement, cast from the Ascendant, marks a specific point. It indicates an individual's use of his material fortune to express his spiritual nature. This lot is not found in the *Astronomica*. Nonetheless, the astrology seems apt. Both the Part of Fortune and the Part of Spirit combine solar and lunar factors. In the *Hieroglyphica*, we find that the hyena (the animal that attacks the Fool, as I have speculated) is a symbol of instability: the animal was legendary for changing gender. We can imagine that masculinity is solar, while femininity is lunar. So the hieroglyph would be nicely integrated with the astrology.

The Fool, as a personification of "Basis," may depend on a pun. The Latin *bassus* means "unrefined, low." The English "base" is comparable. The Tarot's Fool could symbolize the soul, noble in its essence but subjected to ignoble physicality—in the body and in the world. This circumstance is inevitable. Hermetists can accomplish their mission only while they consist of both spirit and matter. The Fool endures base materiality in order to direct the mundane world toward higher spirituality.

Sacred Symmetries



A COMPREHENSIVE SCHEMA

In [chapter 5](#), I arranged the first 14 trumps in a schema that revealed two symmetrical systems (first, an extension of the numerological Completions [trumps 3, 6, 9, 13]; second, an extension of the pagan Virtues [trumps 2, 5, 8, 11, 14]). The periodicity of Virtues continues throughout the trump sequence, involving 17 (Providence) and 20 (Sagacity). The total sequence of trumps can be divided into three groups of seven, as shown below. The numbers of the Virtues appear here in boldface.

1	21
2	<u>20</u>
3	19
4	18
5	<u>17</u>
6	16
7	15
8 9 10 <u>11</u> 12 13 <u>14</u>	

The U-shape of my diagram could be modified to form a circle so that 1 and 21 would be paired between two manifestations of Wisdom, namely the Virtues of Sagacity (trump 20) and Prudence (trump 2). Again, the

diagram could be modified by bringing together the tops of the columns to produce a triangle or pyramid. In an article for the International Playing-Card Society, I tried to draw thematic connections between any two cards occupying the same level on the descending and ascending paths.¹ Certainly trumps 1 and 21 form a meaningful partnership: the Juggler is the Good Demon (*Agathos Daimon*), and the World is Good Fortune (*Agatha Tyche*). Did I not say that Agathodemon and Fortuna shared temples in Ptolemaic Egypt?

My schema possesses another symmetry in two diagonals: the connection between 1 and 15 balances the connection between 7 and 21. The Juggler, as the Good Demon, connects with the Devil, as the Bad Demon. The Chariot, as the Microcosm, connects with the World, as the Macrocosm.

When we extract the Virtues from the trump order, the remaining allegories form seven significant pairs, not only the Juggler and the World, but Empress and Emperor, Love and Chariot, Hermit and Wheel, Hanged Man and Death, Devil and Tower, Moon and Sun. In my view, these pairs participate in a “soul journey” having three stages—descent into matter, probation, and return to pure *psyche*. The diagram charts the three phases respectively on the left, the middle, and the right. This pattern was familiar to the Platonists.

God’s intentions begin as pure Ideas but emanate through a hierarchy of existence, down to the material world. The higher levels include gods, angels, and demons, who are normally invisible. The lower levels include perceptible beings, such as humans, animals, and plants. Some beings—heroes, ghosts, and elementals—can occupy intermediate zones. The details of this progression vary with the opinions of individual philosophers. Most Platonists believed that God and the material universe have always existed. God impressed his Ideas on the coexisting realm of matter, but the latter resisted perfect conformity. Our world falls short of the divine intention. Other philosophers believed that matter is itself the lowest emanation of the forms. It is imperfect because of its vast separation from God. Human beings, while made partially of matter, are an exceptional case, because God has infused us with aspects of his own

powers. We are therefore superior to the demons and even the planetary spirits: they lack our unique experiences and personal creativity.

The Descent

Juggler. In Egypt, the Good Demon was associated with several gods but especially with a creator god, Khnum or Kneph. This association could have been known to the Renaissance through Philo of Byblos (fl. AD 60), quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–ca. 340), a Christian apologist.² I elsewhere related Khnum to one of the earliest versions of the Juggler.³ Khnum appears in Egyptian art as a ram-headed craftsman seated at a potter's wheel on which he forms children representative of the human race. This is somewhat reminiscent both of the Juggler, who sits or stands at a table, and of the Genius in [figure 0.2](#), who greets numerous babies (prenatal souls). Some Juggler trumps include two or more children. Here we have allegories about human beings as expressions of the Supreme Being, the Neoplatonist “One.”

Popess. Oneness generated Two; the divine Mind created Thought. This partnership is remembered in the Bible: Wisdom says, “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old...then I was beside him, like a master artisan” (Proverbs 8:22ff).

Empress and Emperor. In Platonist terms, the highest knowable realm is called the Intelligible Realm. Emanating from it is the Sensible Realm, so called because it is accessible to the senses. In my estimation, those levels could be symbolized as the Empress and the Emperor, which I have called Intellectual Manifestation and Material Manifestation, respectively. The distinction is found in the two aspects of God, transcendent and imminent. Apuleius is remarkably helpful in *De Mundo*, his Latin translation of the Greek *Peri Kosmou* (*Concerning the Cosmos*), incorrectly credited to Aristotle. In Apuleius's rendering of *De Mundo*, God's transcendent aspect becomes *maiestas* (majesty), while God's imminent aspect becomes *potestas* (power).⁴ Here is a perfect explanation for the imperial bearing of

trumps Three and Four. Additionally, in the *Tarot de Marseille*, the Empress (as covert Majesty) is partially hidden by her shield, while the Emperor (as overt Power) is not at all hidden by his shield.

Pope. I have linked this trump to another form of Spirit (the fifth element, the Quintessence), as well as to the universality of Five, the Lot of Devotion, and the Virtue of Beatitude. All of these combine in the present context. The Creator blesses his creatures and confers a fifth element on the basic four and so unites them within a harmonious and organic universe.

Love and Chariot. We have seen that the way for the soul was prepared by the Spirit of the Creator (trump 1), the assistance afforded him by Wisdom (trump 2), his transcendent qualities (trump 3), his imminent qualities (trump 4), and his blessings for the universe (trump 5). Here we arrive at a theoretical problem. The Greek philosophers questioned how the Creator, regarded as absolutely unchanging, could have set the cosmos in motion, which involves change. Aristotle taught that the material world desired to draw close to God.⁵ God did not need to descend into matter and activate it, for it adoringly and voluntarily moved toward him. God stands apart from the cosmos, but the cosmos whirls around him in an orbit beyond the stars, at the circumference of the “First Motion.” Plato likewise regarded love as a universal force, and Apuleius mentions Love as a superior *daimon*. (Recall the Good Demon hovering in the Love trump. The old name for the sixth trump is in fact Love, not the Lovers.) After a substantial universe emanated from the higher archetypes, sparks of divinity could enter into matter as the World Soul and human souls. Our soul resides in a physical body throughout the probation of mortal life. The Chariot in the *T de M* has an appropriate number. Seven is the sum of Three (cf. the parts of the soul) and Four (cf. the elements of the body). Platonists defined soul as “a self-moving number.” And Macrobius made Seven the very number of Motion. I have said that Cornelius Agrippa called Seven “the vehicle.” Plato, in his *Phaedrus*, uses a chariot and driver as an allegory of the soul incarnated.⁶

The Probation

The soul serves its probation in an effort to improve the evolving world. The Hermetic *Asclepius* names some of the powers that control this universe. They are termed *Ousiarchai* (“Rulers of Existence”). Scott suggests that this rare word translates an Egyptian term.⁷ An *Ousiarchés* is a transcendent being that exerts its authority through an imminent being, an agent familiar in our mundane experience. Unfortunately, the system is obscure, and the description has been corrupted and fragmented.⁸

The Ruler of Heaven, or of whatsoever is included under the name of “Heaven,” is Zeus [Jupiter] for life is given to all beings by Zeus through the medium of Heaven. [The *Ousiarchés* of the sun is Light, for the blessing of light pours down on us through the sun.] The Ruler of the Decani,—that is, the thirty-six fixed stars which are called Horoscopi,—is the god named Pantomorphos [or Omniform]; he it is that gives to the individuals of each kind their diverse forms. The seven spheres, as they are called, have as their Ruler the deity called Fortune or Destiny, who changes all things according to the law of natural growth, working with a fixity which is immutable, and yet is varied by everlasting movement. Air is the instrument with which...all is done. [Its *Ousiarchés* is the second....]

The passage is incomplete. Thus, “the second” has been extended by pure speculation. The usual suggestion is Jupiter. This is possible but not very helpful, for I think that *all* of these *Ousiarchai* are aspects of Jupiter as the World Soul. Commentators have tried to complete the system by consulting another passage that again refers to Jupiter.⁹

“The one who dispenses,” whom we call Jupiter, is situated between heaven and earth. But Jupiter Plutonium rules over earth and sea, and it is he who nourishes mortal souls and things that bear fruit. And it is by his power that the fruits of the earth are generated. But other gods will distribute their powers and effects through all things that exist.

By my reckoning, an upper and a lower Jupiter would bring the quantity of *Ousiarchai* to six. I don't see how a Hermetist could refrain from bringing the total to seven. I have considered that we could squeeze the last sentence in the quotation to yield a "Distributor," possibly concerned with the fertility theme. I am gratified to find that the Coptic version of this passage (found in the Nag Hammadi manuscripts) distills the above passage into three powers: Demiurge, Zeus Ploutonios, and Kore.¹⁰ Kore is the "Maiden," a fertility goddess.

The designers of the Tarot of course knew nothing about the Nag Hammadi cache, but they must have known the *Asclepius* itself. Indeed, it would have been one of the primary references used by Renaissance Hermetists. Surely the first Tarotist would not have neglected the best testimony directly from Hermes Trismegistus. Here we must consider not merely the mutilated text, but the interpretation most likely among the founders of Tarotism. We have already seen that the Tarot's astrology involves Jupiter, Horoscopus, and Fortune. With further examination, all seven probationary trumps—both their imagery and their order in the *T de M*—potentially tally with the seven *Ousiarchai* and their agents. However, the trumps seem to have merged Ruler and agent. The two vie for dominance in the cards. The fluidity could be blamed on the sad condition of the manuscript, but we should also consider that the card designers may have exploited the confusion so that their "soul journey" would coordinate with their astrological and arithmological programs.

Justice = Light and the sun. In our *T de M* (figure 0.1), Justice is crowned, and her crown bears a central motif: two concentric circles. I suppose that they function as a solar symbol. Renaissance symbologists knew of a close connection between justice and the sun. The original impetus was an exchange in the biblical book of Malachi: the people exclaim, "Where is the God of justice?" God replies that the evildoers will be burnt like straw, "but for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise..." (Malachi 4:2). The Sun of Righteousness became a topos in Christian writings. Panofsky found that it inspired Dürer's print, "Sol Justitiae," a solar figure who holds scales and a sword.¹¹ In a handcrafted card by Bonifacio Bembo (fl. 1470), Justice sits beneath a Gothic arch; in an upper zone, a knight brandishes a sword as he

rides his charger. Both of the card's upper corners contain stylized suns or bursts of light.

Hermit = *Pantomorphos* and horoscopi. The Hermit type, in exoteric art, is an astrologer. In my view of the Tarot's astrological program, he represents Manilius's *Horoscopus*, the exact degree of the Ascendant in a horoscope chart. In the *Asclepius*, however, the "horoscopes" are the so-called Decans or Decanates. They are ten-degree divisions of the ecliptic, each exerting specific influences on mortal lives. The Decans originated in Egypt where they were personified as demons. Similar systems were developed as far east as India. The Ruler of the Decans, as given in the *Asclepius*, is *Pantomorphos* ("All Form"). But how should an artist visualize such a thing? The Tarot artist must have decided that the Ruler of the "horoscopes" should look like the *Horoscopus* ("Hour Watcher"), whom the *Hieroglyphica* describes as an astrologer-priest.

Wheel = Fortune and the planets. At this mystical level of the Tarot, Fortune is the *Ousiarchés* of the planetary system. (By my astrological interpretation, the Wheel of Fortune is the first of Manilius's lots.) In the Wheel of the *T de M*, six spokes transfix six knobs around a circular hub. The geometry recalls an abstract format in medieval art: the central circle is the sun; the surrounding spheres are the moon and the five classical planets.

Fortitude = a second Unity and the atmosphere. This equation would not have been intended by the author of the *Asclepius*. But the Tarot's designer may have taken advantage of the gap in the text, where the relevant passage refers to a *second* something (lost by the scribe). In our survey of number symbolism, we learned that Eleven can be Unity in a new context. The U-shaped schema (given above) displays the symmetrical relationships among trumps 1, 11, 21. The Juggler and the World supply unity at the beginning and the end of the soul's journey. Fortitude supplies unity in the midst of the soul's probation. The *Asclepius* says that this *Ousiarchés* governs the air. Perhaps this explains the feathers on Fortitude's hat brim.

Hanged Man = Celestial Jupiter and dispensations. The Hanged Man personifies the administering of the law, as I theorized when studying the lots of the *Astronomica*. The law, in this instance, is a spiritual system or divine *dispensation*. Strictly speaking, the Dispensator would not be the hanging man himself but the unseen power that causes the man to suffer.

Death = Plutonian Jupiter and the underworld. Pluto, the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Hades, is the ruler of the shadowy afterlife beneath the earth. Despite his association with gloom and doom, Pluto has a positive trait: he promotes the growth of vegetation because it springs from the earth. The blending of Pluto and Jupiter has an ancient precedent in Greece. The poet Hesiod (eighth cent. BC) advises the farmer to pray to “Zeus of the lower world.” The medieval figure of Death traditionally uses a scythe to reap human bodies amid grass and leaves, as in the *T de M*. He thus happens to fulfill the role of the *Ousiarchés* called Jupiter Plutonium, who concentrates on mortals (things that have souls) and vegetation (things that bear fruit).

Temperance = Kore and fertility. I have already connected Temperance to a renewed mixing of elements and a regeneration of life. This Hermetic interpretation of the trump is compatible with the fertility of Kore. The name “Kore” sometimes refers specifically to Persephone, a fertility goddess and the wife of Hades. Temperance’s possible pun on time (Latin *tempus*) becomes germane, for Kore would watch over the annual cycles of sowing, cultivation, harvest, and storage. In Egypt, the agricultural cycle began with the Nile floods. In the Temperance card, an influx of water is central.

Interlude

If the Tarot initially possessed 14 trumps resembling the first 14 in the *T de M*, the Temperance card was climactic. It would have concluded two septenaries involving the soul’s descent and probation. A Hermetic interpretation of Temperance would bespeak something beyond death. This reinforces my notion that Temperance implies the soul’s transcendence. In

the *T de M*, the Virtue's wings could symbolize this transmigration to a higher existence. When the Tarot's designers decided to add more trumps, the metaphysical status of Temperance could have been the impetus to extend the series with a related septenary, the ascent of the soul.

The Ascent

This sequence draws on the next sections of the *Asclepius*. This further use of the *Asclepius* indicates that the designers who completed the Tarot understood the symbolism intended by those who conceived the Tarot. The same person or persons may have been involved at both stages.

Devil and Tower. At *Asclepius* 28, Hermes Trismegistus says that the body dies, but the soul continues according to its evaluation by the Chief Demon. "If he finds it pious and just, he lets it stay in suitable places. But if he sees the soul stained with the marks of wrongdoing and dirtied with vice, he sends it tumbling down from on high to the depths below and consigns it to the storms and vortices of air, fire, and water in their endless tumult." (Note the tumbling figures in the tumultuous Tower trump.) The burning tower conforms to stock images of Hell and Purgatory. For mainstream religionists who object to finding Purgatory along an ascent, rather than a descent, I would plead that pagans came to imagine this zone in the atmosphere or higher.¹² Even the Christian poet Dante envisioned himself descending into Hell, passing through the center of the planet, and *ascending* through Purgatory, aiming for the heavens.

Star. Presumably everyone but the perfect sage will need to undergo purgation. The Star, as Providence (Foresight), promises that the punishment will not be unduly extreme. "The divinity *foreknows* all [of one's deeds], so the penalties inflicted will accord with the offences" (*Asclepius* 28). We learned from the *Hieroglyphica* that a star can symbolize Providence, and Apuleius states explicitly that the celestial gods, namely the stars and/or planets, have been given the duty of dispensing divine Providence.¹³

Moon and Sun. “When the shadows of error [cf. the Moon card] are dispelled from the man’s soul, and he has perceived the light of truth [cf. the Sun card], his senses are wholly absorbed in the knowledge of God” (*Asclepius* 29). The moon’s light is superior to a star’s. But the moon’s shadows render it inferior to the sun. Not only is the moon’s face often shadowed and always smudged with darkness, the moonlight provides poor illumination on earth. However, the Moon of the *T de M* provides a pair of howling canines. The dog is a conventional symbol of fidelity and of concentration (the latter is explicit in the *Hieroglyphica*). Here, the dog would be especially devoted. It is a familiar of the lunar goddess, Diana, patroness of the hunt. Perhaps, in the esoteric Tarot, the dog’s devotion is meant to assist the soul in advancing to the next level. The sun, of course, dispels shadows and sadness. “The sun illuminates...by its divinity and holiness. The sun is indeed a second god” (*Asclepius* 29).

Angel. Here the soul rediscovers its immortality. “Nothing in the world is mortal. Since every intrinsic part of it lives forever and lives in a world that is in itself a unified living organism that lives forever, there is no place in it for mortality” (*Asclepius* 29).

World. “The world must be full of life and eternity” (*Asclepius* 29). “Eternity’s life-giving power stirs the world, and the place of the world is within that living eternity.... The world will never stop moving or be destroyed” (*Asclepius* 30).

A Ladder of Light (an Initiation?)

The seven highest trumps apparently express the increasing intensity of light.¹⁴ We begin with the darkness of the Devil and end with the radiance of the World: Isis illuminates all the gods with her splendor; the four “living creatures,” according to the Book of Revelation, are studded with eyes, meaning stars.

The Tarot’s allusions to light are nicely suited to the soul’s ascent in the afterlife. However, they also could hint at stages of an initiation. The

symbolism is interchangeable: it could chart the evolution from gloomy Hell to vibrant Eternity; or, the same succession of cards could chart the *vision* of the afterlife experienced by initiated Middle Platonists, Hermetists, or Neoplatonists.

Apuleius, in his *Metamorphosis*, probably draws on his own experience when he has his hero describe the wonders of the mystery rites. His description is compatible with the progress implied in the seven highest trumps. “I approached the confines of death, and having trod on the threshold of Proserpina [the Roman Persephone, goddess of the dead], I returned from it, being carried through all the elements. At midnight I saw the sun shining with a splendid light. And, with familiarity, I drew near to the infernal gods and the supernal gods, and I adored them.”¹⁵

The Tarot’s designers would have been well aware that an Egyptian mystery religion once existed, and they might have wished to reconstruct something of it. This does not necessarily require that the first Tarotists secretly donned outlandish hats, entered stagy halls, and sang bogus hymns. On the contrary, they may have ridiculed the traditional mysteries as emotional exhibitionism. Plato did so. However, he offered an improvement: contemplative studies. He held that the benefits of the mysteries—catharsis, concentration, transcendence, enlightenment—were better attained by philosophical debate, reading, and reasoning. This has been termed “literary mystery” and “philosophical initiation.”¹⁶ Plato’s concept spread among Renaissance intellectuals and culminated in the Florentine “academy.”

The Platonic approach was no less arcane than the popular mysteries. The following passage from Firmicus Maternus is explicit.¹⁷

When Orpheus initiated strangers into his mysteries, he required nothing of them but an oath—an oath backed by the fearsome authority of religion—that the rites would not be betrayed to profane ears. It is generally agreed that Plato also was concerned that the precious concepts of his secret discourses should not be revealed to the uninstructed. Pythagoras, too, and our Porphyry believed that their ideas should be shrouded in religious silence.

Firmicus raised the issue of secrecy because he regarded his subject, astrology, to be part of the mystery tradition. The above passage precedes an earnest request that his friend, the recipient of the *Mathesis*, reserve its doctrines for uncorrupted souls. The authors of the Tarot may have been equally secretive about their cards, laden with astrology and Pythagoreanism. This alone would explain why we have no authoritative commentary on the deck. (In [chapter 4](#), I similarly observed that Renaissance Neoplatonists neither wanted nor needed open explanations for mystical “hieroglyphs.”)

The septenary of trumps as a “ladder of light,” suggested here, is of course parallel with the numerical sequence. Its numerology fits nicely. We can also see the parallel with the astral archetypes. The darkest card, the Devil, is the most unkind planet, Saturn, in his role as the Greater Infortune; and the most refulgent card, the World, is the kindest planet, Jupiter, in his role as the Greater Fortune. The Tarot’s Hermetic programs are beautifully integrated.

TWO ROMAN PLATONISTS

Firmicus Maternus was acquainted with Hermetism, but the Hermetic Tarot is more obviously indebted to two other Romans. I refer to the aforementioned Apuleius and Macrobius. They were not Hermetists but were closely allied to them, for all were spiritual heirs of Plato and were steeped in metaphysical studies.

Apuleius translated Nicomachus’s *Introduction to Arithmetic*, a probable influence on the Tarot. The symbolism of the Decad contains hints of the soul’s “progression.”¹⁸ Apuleius’s translation of *De Mundo* nicely provides key terms for the conditions of the soul’s descent. Apuleius was supposed to have translated the *Asclepius*, which seems to have supplied the Tarot’s imagery for the soul’s probation and ascent. The *Metamorphosis* could have inspired the Tarot designer as he sought to infuse the higher trumps with a transcendent aura. Apuleius’s *De Platone* supplies the Tarot’s seven Virtues, consisting of four that are conventional (trumps 2, 8, 11, 14) and three that are idiosyncratic (trumps 5, 17, 20).

Apuleius, like Macrobius, revered the number Seven. In the *Metamorphosis*, the hero prays to Isis for deliverance from the magical spell that confines him to the body of an ass. He contemplates the full moon at the seashore. There, after he plunges into the waves for the seventh time, he has a vision of the goddess. She instructs him in a counterspell. He is able to obey her and to regain his human form. He becomes an initiate in the mysteries of Isis and of Osiris.

Macrobius, a Christian Platonist, recorded his opinion of Apuleius, a pagan Platonist. Macrobius ignored the splendid culmination of Apuleius's spiritual quest in the *Metamorphosis* but complained about the sexual fantasies in some of its subplots. Other Platonists regarded the entire story as an allegory about the soul's improvement through the Egyptian mysteries. The story's pathetic narrator was condemned to a probationary stint as a donkey; but, as such, he was no worse than most men, impeded by their material nature. Fortunately (that is, by the grace of Isis as Good Fortune), he achieved enlightenment and became not merely a man but a sage. This was the interpretation bestowed by Philippus Beroaldus in the Renaissance¹⁹ and by Thomas Taylor in the Romantic period.²⁰

Macrobius too is of importance to the Tarot. His *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* supplies the formula that links any two numbers that add up to seven. The linkages certainly seem to have shaped the six lower trumps of the *T de M*. Macrobius helpfully attributes the number Seven to Motion and the number Eight to Justice. Also worth remembering is the basic structure of the *Dream of Scipio*. The elder Scipio experienced the ascent to the stars as part of his afterlife. The younger Scipio experienced the ascent as a vision. The Virtues actually facilitate the ascent. Macrobius, in one of several discussions of the Platonic Virtues, gives them four mystagogical functions.²¹

Prudence: to despise the world in contemplation of things divine

Temperance: to abstain from everything that the body habitually seeks

Courage: for the soul not to be terrified as it leaves the body and ascends to the heavens

Justice: to accept this way of life and obey all the virtues

Like Macrobius, I have usually discussed the Platonic virtues as human attributes. The additional virtues—especially as seen in trump 5 (the Beatitude of the Holy Spirit) and trump 17 (the divine Providence of the stars)—may seem more like qualities of God. Of course, nothing prevents both God and humans from being virtuous. Hermetism in fact holds that humans possess godlike qualities. The Hermetic literature refers to the Virtues as “Powers.” They are God’s gifts, enabling humans to combat the “Punishments” (Vices).

A few Hermetists, such as those of medieval Harran, understood their direct debt to Plato. It was not at all clear to the Hermetists of Renaissance Italy. The latter group, like Lactantius, believed that Platonism was indebted to Hermetism, rather than the reverse. This explains why the authors of the Tarot would have earnestly studied the works of Plato and his devotees.

THE FOOL

If the Fool is to be added to this scheme of sacred symmetries, the figure is best placed in the center (no matter whether the reader prefers that my schema be U-shaped, circular, or triangular). The Fool becomes the wandering soul, experiencing influences from all the surrounding archetypes.

The Fool is further clarified if his card is part of the “literary initiation” that I earlier proposed. Plato includes the ability to “rant properly” (ὀρθὸν μαίνεισθαι).²² The ranting or raging could be the activity of the Tarot Fool. A long tradition, probably going back to prehistoric shamanism, links irrational behavior with supernatural knowledge. In classical cultures, madness was thought to confer the gift of prophecy. Plato called it “divine madness.” The Greeks presupposed a connection between “manic” (lunatic) and “mantic” (prophetic). The etymological root for both words is the Indo-European *men-*, “to be mentally excited.”

The ancient prophet, like the shaman, was revered because of his power but avoided because of his eccentricity. The most famous Greek prophecies were those delivered at Delphi, where the priestess served as a sort of medium. Her conduct was half-crazed, and her pronouncements required translation by attendants. The shrine was dedicated to Apollo, and he was indeed the patron of all seers. So “divine madness” was encouraged by the sun god.²³ We have also seen that the moon induces certain forms of lunacy. A double dose of insanity, solar and lunar, is striking in the current context: I have inferred that both the sun and the moon doubly participate in the Fool’s complicated astrology, as the Lot of Basis. I previously implied a connection with the Latin *bassus*, “low.” Perhaps a better connection is provided by the Greek word for “basis,” which means “a platform, a step,” from the verb “to go.” That is compatible with “the initiate,” which means “one who begins.” I suppose that the Fool is the person crazy enough to step up and begin a mystical quest.

Part Three



Tarot and Cartomancy

Etteilla's Career



“THE LAST SORCERER”

Jean-Baptiste Alliette (1738–1791), better known as “Etteilla,” was a card reader, Hermetic teacher, and Tarot designer. He commanded respect in his own time and attained celebrity in his social class and higher. He was the subject of J.-B. Millet-Saint-Pierre’s *Recherches sur le Dernier Sorcier et la Dernière École de Magie* (*Research on the Last Sorcerer and the Last School of Magic*, Le Havre, 1859). By then, however, cartomancers and magicians seem to have regarded Etteilla’s plebeian status as a cause for embarrassment. They routinely insulted his work (on which they themselves showed great dependence, whether they were aware of it or not). They preferred that the Tarot not be associated with his name. By the twentieth century, his first name had been completely forgotten among Tarotists. His identity and reputation have been resuscitated by Thierry Depaulis. This chapter is greatly indebted to him.¹

Etteilla’s writing is often irrational and unreadable; he is frustratingly silent about the origins of his ideas, and he sometimes cloaks them in ridiculous fables. Still, his dedication to the Tarot is unquestionable, and his influence on its development is still unappreciated and, indeed, unrecognized.

Early Years as Alliette

Etteilla was born as Alliette on 1 March 1738 in Paris. His parents were Jean-Baptiste Alliette (d. 1758) and Marie-Anne Bautrey (d. 1769). They already had a son, also named Jean-Baptiste! The elder brother eventually joined the parents in their catering service. When the father died, the elder son continued as a caterer, while the widow became a merchant of seed or grain.

Etteilla, during his adolescence, became interested in divinatory cards. The operative deck was that used for the fashionable game of piquet. The piquet deck has the traditional French suits—Diamonds, Hearts, Spades, and Clubs—but has 32 cards by the omission of the Two through Six from each suit in the standard 52-card deck. Etteilla coined the term *cartonomancie*, later altered, despite his objections, to *cartomancie* (cartomancy). We have the benefit of a rare text, *Etteilla, ou l'Art de Lire dans les Cartes* (*Etteilla, or the Art of Reading Cards*, Paris, 1791). The work is anonymous but is probably by Alliette himself. It tells of an early stage of fortunetelling with cards in France.²

In France in 1750, no one yet knew how to “draw at cards” [i.e., to draw them from a pack, for divination]; but in 1751, '52, and '53, three elderly persons, a man and two women, offered to draw cards. In this they were correct, allowing for the fact that they shuffled and cut a pack of 32 cards and drew them one by one; and when the questioner withdrew a Spade, (so claimed these oldsters), it announced sorrow; Hearts thus announced joy, Diamonds the countryside, and Clubs money....

By 1753, our savant and Cartonmancy's sole Renovator [Etteilla] had begun by rejecting the art of *drawing cards one at a time* and by providing the art of reading entire groups of cards spread on the table....

Our author, by 1753, in giving the manner of reading the meanings applied to the cards, not only rectified the false significations individually allowed by those three persons [aforementioned], but, in addition, had harmonized those significations, properly taking that for the Nine of Hearts to be Victory, which one of those three persons had wrongly attributed to the Nine of Diamonds, etc.

The fifteen-year-old Etteilla, although fascinated by the reading of cards, was alert to its inconsistencies, and he confidently addressed them. He tabulated the cards' meanings and issued the tables in print.

The adult Etteilla did not immediately devote himself to professional cartomancy. He made an attempt at a conventional family life. In about 1760, he married Jeanne Vattier. They had a son, Louis-Jean-Baptiste Alliette. The young parents, like Etteilla's mother, were grain merchants. The couple separated in 1767. The wife continued in the family business while the husband became a fortuneteller, astrologer, alchemist, spiritual advisor, and general magus. At this time, he reversed the letters of Alliette to produce a more exotic name.

Etteilla and Common Cartomancy

Etteilla was a social activist, and he reportedly aided older card readers who were punished because of their eccentric pursuits.³

Fanaticism cried out against sortilege, and the Police, in order to save these pretended sorcerers from the *devout*, contrived, without a hearing, to confine those [sorcerers] in [the asylums] Bicêtre or la Salpêtrière.

This tyranny prevailed until 1770 when Etteilla, who had reflected, studied and finally recognized that the false art of drawing cards came from the most useful and sublime of sciences, then quite reasonably and skillfully—with a force equal to that of the police and the fanatics—opposed their ignorance.

We eventually will identify the “sublime science” that provided the foundation for the “false art” of fortunetelling with common French cards.

We see that Etteilla openly championed the universal right to intellectual freedom. This was greatly to his credit, for he was defending other cartomancers despite his dismay at their flawed profession—dependent on inadequate methods, distorted interpretations, and strange histories of cartomancy. (Etteilla initially accepted a myth that piquet cartomancy was modeled on the thirty-three batons employed by a

soothsayer, Alpha, whom Etteilla described as a Greek refugee in Spain or Gaul. Etteilla later dismissed this oracle of Alpha as “illusion.”)

Etteilla’s reputation as a card reader was certainly established by 1770. A positive profile of Etteilla appeared in *Lettre sur l’Oracle du Jour* (*Letter on the Oracle of the Day*, Paris, 1772), a small book authored by “Duchess de ***” but probably instigated by Etteilla himself. Claude-Nicolas Bricaire de la Dixmerie, in a booklet titled *La Comète: Conte en l’Aire* (*The Comet: Narrative in the Sky*, Paris, 1773), says that Etteilla and another fortuneteller divided the entire country between them.

Etteilla’s first book, as distinct from pamphlets, was *Etteilla, ou Manière de se Récréer avec un Jeu de Cartes par M**** (*Etteilla, or Manner of Entertaining Oneself with a Deck of Cards by Mr---*, Amsterdam and Paris, 1770). Reissues and revisions of the book appeared under different titles in the 1770s and ’80s. “Etteilla” is oddly the name of several of his publications. He may have intended it to identify his commercial products but later accepted it as his personal pseudonym. He continued using it to name himself and his products. This first book explains how to tell fortunes with piquet cards. Near its close, Etteilla casually provides the first French citation of the Tarot as a divinatory tool: *Taraux* (an archaic spelling) begins a list that also includes molten lead, coffee grounds, and the white of an egg.⁴ Subsequent editions of the book strangely omit the reference to *Taraux*.

Etteilla and the Tarot

Etteilla maintained that he wrote a dissertation on the Tarot’s Popess. This suggests that he made an early effort to interpret the trumps as arcane allegories. In 1777, his dissertation supposedly prompted a group in Frankfurt-am-Main to award him the titles of “Astro-phil-astres” and “Magus of France.” I infer that some belief in an esoteric Tarot was already far-flung—if, indeed, Etteilla is trustworthy. Most critics doubt him. I remain agnostic. I grant that Etteilla’s writings are perversely opaque, but I do not think that he was deliberately misleading in order to aggrandize himself. Were he a blatant liar, he could have credited himself

with much more grandiose achievements. Authorship of a dissertation about the Popess is not an extremely high distinction, especially as Etteilla came to doubt the validity of this card and finally decided that it should be deleted from the deck. Etteilla's character is eccentric and elusive.

During the decade of the 1770s, Etteilla was a retailer of prints. Records place him not only in Paris but in Strasbourg, where he joined the guild of print dealers. His expertise in prints led him to a knowledge of Tarot cards locally manufactured for games. He seems to have left Strasbourg ca. 1780, for he is not listed in the city's 1781 guild book.⁵

Etteilla settled permanently in Paris. In 1781, Parisian esoterists must have been abuzz about the publication of the latest volume of Antoine Court de Gébelin's *Monde Primitif*.

Monde Primitif

Antoine Court (1719–1784) was born, raised, and educated in Switzerland but had French parents. He became a Protestant pastor, having followed the example of his father (also Antoine Court). But the younger clergyman apparently cared less for Christianity and more for pre-Christian religions and occult philosophy. He achieved prominence in France, where he insinuated himself into the highest social circles, including the royal court. He embellished his name with the suffix “de Gébelin,” meant to suggest aristocratic connections. He wrote a rambling nine-volume work, *Monde Primitif, Analisé et Comparé avec le Monde Moderne* (*The Archaic World, Analyzed and Compared with the Modern World*, Paris, 1773–82).

De Gébelin, according to his own account, attended a party at the home of “Madame la C d’H” (thought to have been Mme. Helvétius, the widow of the famous encyclopedist). De Gébelin observed a card game being played with the exotic Tarot. (It was indeed exotic to most Parisians at that time. Mme. Helvétius was well traveled and probably brought a Tarot deck from Switzerland or Germany, where the game was then popular.) De Gébelin had encountered the Tarot during his childhood in Switzerland, but only now did he recognize its tremendous import. He proclaimed it to be the remnant of an Egyptian book containing deep mysteries. Without

hesitation, he snatched up the trumps, one after another, and explained them to his astonished audience. (We can guess that some onlookers were astonished at de Gébelin's discourtesy in interrupting the card playing.)

De Gébelin told the above story and presented his theory in the eighth volume of *Monde Primitif*. He supplemented his own Tarot essay with de Mellet's (see my introduction). Both de Mellet and de Gébelin toyed with a parallel between the Tarot trumps and the Hebrew alphabet. They also pretended that the suit-signs in Spain evolved from those of the Tarot. (Of course, we have learned that the Spanish suit-signs and the Italian suit-signs are similar because both evolved from Muslim cards.) The authors said that divination was anciently pursued with Tarots, Spanish cards, and French cards. De Mellet offered an example of card divination supposedly by Egyptian priests. He cited no source for his detailed information.

Career as a Magus

Etteilla was ready to concentrate on divination with the Tarot. He quickly penned *Cartomanie Égyptienne, ou Interprétation de 78 Hieroglyphes Qui Sont sur les Cartes Nommées Tarots* (*Egyptian Cartomania, or Interpretation of 78 Hieroglyphs That Are on the Cards Called Tarots*), which he submitted for publication in 1782. The royal censor suppressed the work. The title page of *Monde Primitif*, vol. 8, declares that de Gébelin was royal censor in 1781. He is not identified as a censor in 1782, but he doubtless could have exerted his influence to silence Etteilla. If so, Etteilla behaved admirably, naming no names and maintaining a respectful tone toward de Gébelin. Etteilla apparently succeeded in marketing his magical skills. His 1782 list is preserved in transcript.⁶ In translation, it reads:

To correspond or converse about "advanced sciences".....	3 livres
For lessons in practical magic.....	3 livres
For a large horoscope.....	100 livres
For a medium horoscope.....	50 livres
For a small horoscope.....	24 livres
For a card reading.....	24 livres

To consult after a horoscope or card reading.....3 or 6 *livres*
 To resolve several pending questions..... 6 *livres*
 To learn of one's *genie*: name, qualities, powers.....12 *livres*
 To interpret a dream.....6 *livres*
 To make a talisman...from 8 or 10 *louis* depending on the demands
 For a spiritual doctor or permanent diviner.....30 *livres* per month

A new censor in 1783 was better disposed toward Etteilla. That date fits with my suspicion that de G  belin was the ultimate force behind the censorship of Etteilla's *Cartomanie   gyptienne*. In the spring of 1783, de G  belin's health suddenly declined. He surely would have lost interest in intellectual debates with anyone, especially with the bourgeois Etteilla, who lacked credentials in the academy and the court. Etteilla was allowed to publish a Tarot book under a new title: *Mani  re de se R  cr  er avec le Jeu de Cartes Nomm  es Tarots (Method of Entertaining Oneself with the Deck of Cards Called Tarots*, Amsterdam and Paris). This evolved into a series of texts divided into *Notebooks (Cahiers)*, each followed by its own "Supplement." The sequence was convoluted and interspersed with other esoteric works, as follows.

- 1783: *Third Notebook*
First Notebook
Supplement to the First Notebook
- 1784: *Supplement to the Third Notebook*
Fragment on the Advanced Sciences [Fragment sur les Hautes Sciences] (on magic)
- 1785: *Fourth Notebook*
Supplement to the Fourth Notebook
Second Notebook
Philosophy of the Advanced Sciences [Philosophie des Hautes Sciences] (on magic)
- 1786: *Supplement to the Second Notebook*
The Seven Levels of the Philosophical-Hermetic Work [Les Sept Nuances de l'Oeuvre Philosophique-Herm  tique] (on alchemy)

Each *Notebook* has as its frontispiece an engraving of a Platonic Virtue (in chronological order: Temperance, Justice, Prudence, Fortitude). Three

of them are conventional figures: Temperance pours water into wine; Justice holds her sword and balances; Fortitude subdues a lion. Etteilla's allegory of Prudence is a woman holding a caduceus in her left hand while gathering her skirt with her right hand; a snake induces her to pause prudently. This image was designed to replace the Tarot's Hanged Man, which de Gébelin and Etteilla rejected as a card maker's erroneous personification of the Virtue. They were encouraged by the "Belgian Tarot" in which the Hanged Man is unrestrained and standing on one foot. Etteilla further reconciled the images: the rope around the man's ankle has become the snake at the woman's toe. Etteilla's Prudence could possibly derive from some older version, especially if the caduceus was previously a mirror and the snake was more friendly. Those are typical attributes of Prudence, as seen in the Florentine Tarot (*Minchiate*). The mirror symbolizes reflectivity or self-examination. The serpent is an ancient symbol of wisdom and is reinforced by Christ's advice to be "subtle as serpents" (Matthew 10:16).

Etteilla accepted the Tarot as the descendant of Egyptian hieroglyphs. He averred that the deck was created by a group of seventeen magi under the guidance of Hermes Trismegistus. Etteilla, writing in 1783, calculated that the Tarot was 3,953 years old. He reported that it had been engraved on leaves of gold that adorned the altar of a "fire temple" located three leagues from Memphis. The leaves were the pages that constituted the unsuspected Book of Thoth. Of course, Etteilla was being unduly specific; he cannot have built his story on any reliable testimony. However, he was insightful in converting Thoth into Hermes Trismegistus. Hermetism offers the most likely fund of images for the Tarot trumps. Etteilla turned to a study of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. It is a reasonable source, but it is disqualified as the exact inspiration for the cards: recall that they were invented in Italy ca. 1440, while the *Corpus* did not arrive there until the 1460s.

Etteilla repeatedly claimed that he had met an elderly Piedmontese man who shared his notes on the Tarot as an "Egyptian book."⁷ This occurred in Lamballe (in Brittany) in 1757, and studies continued until 1765. Detractors assume that Etteilla was lying about this early instruction, for his boasting began only after *Monde Primitif* promoted the

Tarot as the “Book of Thoth.” And prior to that promotion, no one had openly advertised the deck for any esoteric purpose. Again, I would not hastily dismiss Etteilla’s assertions. The old Piedmontese tutor might really have existed. For if Etteilla were simply lying, surely he would have said that his mentor was an *Egyptian*. That would have meshed better with de Gébelin’s stylish theory. No one at that time had any inkling that the Tarot had come from Italy.

Etteilla’s first biographer, Millet-Saint-Pierre, wrote that Etteilla’s Piedmontese benefactor was named Alexis. Unfortunately, this account dates only from 1859, and the biographer cites no source. Thierry Depaulis has alerted us to possible confusion.⁸ “Alexis Piémontois” was the French version of “Alessio Piemontese,” the pseudonym of Girolamo Ruscelli (1520–1566), a polymath and author. I have recently found a comment by Etteilla’s successor, Jéjalel, saying that Etteilla’s mentor was a *descendant* of the Renaissance Alexis.⁹ Jéjalel does not give the mentor’s own name.

What might Etteilla have learned from his teacher? It just possibly could have been an Egyptianizing theory of the Tarot. The circulation of such a theory can be deduced by reading between the lines of *Monde Primitif*.¹⁰ Etteilla was gratified that a scholar of de Gébelin’s status would attend to the Tarot and trace its genesis to Egypt. Nevertheless, Etteilla never exulted in the details of de Gébelin’s “discoveries.” Etteilla had quite different opinions. He must have had confidence in them, for he dared to publish them and directly contradict the illustrious de Gébelin. Etteilla’s defiance of de Mellet was still greater. Etteilla declared that the count’s expertise in cartomancy came entirely from the count’s kitchen maid.¹¹

Etteilla, having written briefly on magic and on alchemy, now published on phrenology and on palmistry. He also completed *Sciences. Leçons Théoretiques et Pratiques du Livre de Thot. Moyennes Classes* (*Sciences. Theoretical and Practical Lessons on the Book of Thoth. Intermediate Classes*, Paris, 1787).

Disciples

In 1788, Etteilla formed a study group, the Society of the Interpreters of the Book of Thoth. Several members—de Bonrecueille, Hugand, Hisler, Joubert de la Salette, and d’Odoucet—have been identified, largely thanks to Thierry Depaulis.¹²

De Bonrecueille is known through the research of Robert Amadou.¹³ Charles Greille-Saint-Leger de Bonrecueille was born in Paris in 1753. In 1773, he became a Freemason. At about age thirty, he moved to Lyons, where he founded an esoteric society, the Temple of the Sun. Members referred to themselves as “Unknown Philosophers.” The reference is to Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803), a mystic who published under the pseudonym of the Unknown Philosopher. The “Temple” at Lyons obviously honored de Saint-Martin. A question remains as to his personal patronage, for he had many admirers and followers who knew his teachings only through his books. However, de Saint-Martin himself had settled in Lyons in 1773, so some contact with the Temple of the Sun seems likely. De Bonrecueille and Etteilla corresponded about the Tarot and also about astrology, numerology, and magic.

Claude Hugand was born in Lyons. He seems to have gained experience there as an editor, publisher, and bookseller. He was well acquainted with de Bonrecueille and, by 1788, was prominent in the Temple of the Sun. Hugand also joined Etteilla’s group. Hugand was often addressed as Jéjalel, a mystical name (borrowed from an angel recorded in the cabalistic *Shem ha-Mephorash*). Like Etteilla, Hugand was involved in practical magic and in politics. Hugand wrote a pamphlet entitled *Faites Mieux, J’y Consens, ou les Instructions d’Isis Divulguées par un Électeur de la Commune de Lyon, en l’Année 1789* (*Do Better, I Agree, or the Instructions of Isis Revealed by a Voter of the Commune of Lyons, in the Year 1789*). Etteilla admired Hugand and ultimately declared him one of only two true disciples, although Etteilla claimed to have attracted 150 students.

Etteilla’s other faithful disciple was a Prussian called Hisler, whose primary residence was Berlin. He studied with Etteilla in 1769 and ’70, at the beginning of Etteilla’s professional cartomancy. Hisler designed a form of lotto that Etteilla called a *combination hislérique* (Hislerian Combination). Etteilla published it in French in 1782. Hisler is known to

have visited Etteilla in Paris in 1788, probably at the inception of the Society of the Interpreters of the Book of Thoth. “Hisler” is likely to have been a nickname, a humorous one. In the prophetic *Centuries* by the seer Nostradamus (1503–1566), Germany someday would fall under the sway of a man named Hisler.

Pierre-Joseph Joubert de la Salette (1742–1833) was a native of Grenoble and served there in the army and attained the rank of general in the artillery. He wrote books on musicology, and he privately studied alchemy and magic. By 1788, he had contacted de Bonrecueille and Hugand in Lyons. Hugand guided the aspirant to membership in Etteilla’s society. In the spring of 1790, de la Salette joined the Temple of the Sun.¹⁴ Membership in the Temple was meant to be kept secret, but de la Salette revealed the secret to Etteilla. The Lyonnaise group therefore reprimanded de la Salette.

Melchior-Montmignon d’Odoucet met Etteilla in 1787 and became a disciple in 1788. Etteilla, advertising in a four-page pamphlet, *Livre de Thot* (*Book of Thoth*, Paris, 1789), says that readers desiring more information can acquire his combined work in 1,200 pages (presumably his entire series of “Notebooks” and “Supplements”) or can enroll for lessons with him or his pupil, Monsieur d’Odoucet. D’Odoucet was emerging as an editor and printer who, like Etteilla, would mingle his political and occult philosophies. Unfortunately, the men were on opposite sides. D’Odoucet was a royalist, while Etteilla supported the rising Revolution.

The Grand Etteilla

Up to this point, cartomancers used decks marketed primarily for play. Bolognese cartomancers used their *Tarocchino* (Small Tarot).¹⁵ Etteilla used piquet cards and some version of the *Tarot de Marseille*. Etteilla had considered producing a cartomantic Tarot designed to his specifications but had abandoned the plan. Now he brought it to completion. The deck, called the “Grand Etteilla,” was ready in 1789. The cards were issued as copperplate engravings of high quality. Etteilla, as a former print dealer,

undoubtedly was an able supervisor of the Tarot project. Etteilla's Tarot was the first expressly made for cartomancy and not for games. The Grand Etteilla is still available as a lithographic copy, faithful to the originals, although inferior in technique.

Etteilla's trumps are unconventional in some of their subjects and most of their numbers. He incorporates his versions of the Cardinal Virtues, including his innovative Prudence. He displaces the first trump and eliminates the Popess, Pope, Empress, and Emperor. Those four have been replaced with idiosyncratic trumps: Chaos, the Heavens, Birds and Fish, and Rest (Eve standing in the Garden of Eden). Interleaved with those innovations are variations on the Sun, Moon, Star, and World. The resulting sequence of cards represents the story of Creation. Etteilla obviously borrows the general idea from *Monde Primitif*. The trumps in this initial set have alternative numbers. Etteilla's aim is to provide Hermetic and cabalistic counterparts to the biblical story of Creation. (For details, see [chapter 9](#).)

The Grand Etteilla Tarot bears a few resemblances to the so-called *Tarot de Besançon*. That deck in fact originated in Switzerland when card makers there altered the *T de M* with substitutions: Juno for the Popess, Jupiter for the Pope. The Devil in the *Tarot de Besançon* influenced Etteilla's version: the minor demons are shown in profile as they reverentially gesture toward their master. The figures in the Sun card stand before substantial masonry that Etteilla developed into a monument that he meant to be Egyptian. In the *Besançon* World, the nude woman stands between two little prongs poking up from the ground; they are sometimes rendered as neat triangles ([figure 8.1](#)). They inspired Etteilla to pose Isis between two pyramids. The conventional figure wears a girdle of flowers, which Etteilla pictured as roses, sacred to Isis.

Etteilla made allusions to the Tarot's suit-signs when he redesigned the Magician card ([figure 8.2](#)). A magus or high priest holds a wand as he stands at an altar, which is strewn with consecrated items. Ten rings lie in a triangular arrangement (the Pythagorean Decad in the form of the tetractys). Also on that end of the altar is "a set of golden pages or plates [*lames*], namely the Book of *Thoth*."¹⁶ The wand alludes to the Tarot's Batons; the rings allude to the Coins; a vase alludes to the Cups. The set of

lames (the Tarot deck) alludes to Swords, because the word *lames* also means “blades.”

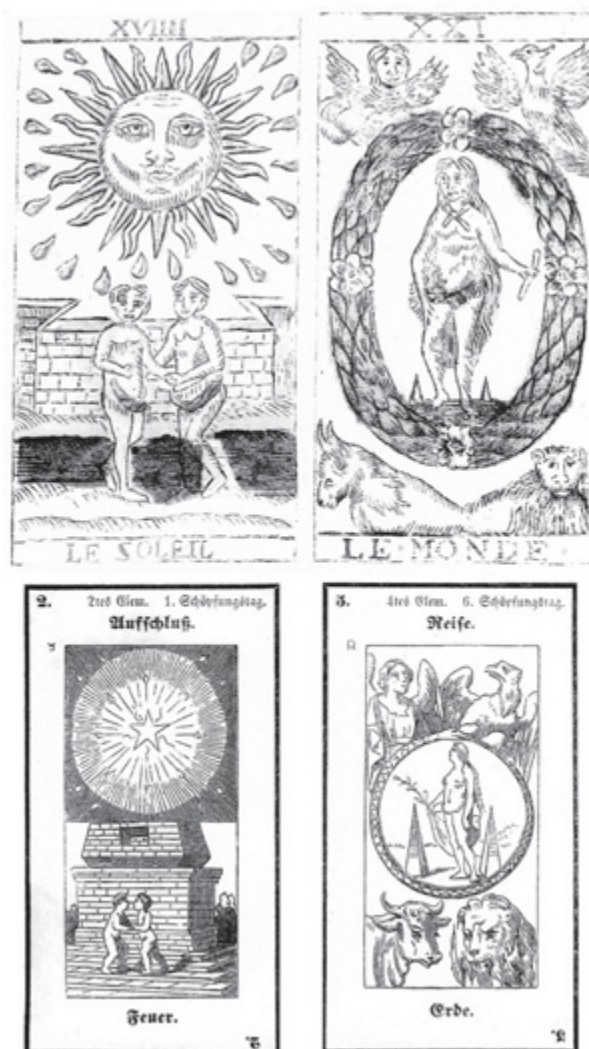


Figure 8.1. Above: Sun and World trumps of the *Tarot de Besançon*, woodcut and stencil, Swiss?, 1700s. Below: Trumps from the Grand Etteilla Tarot, wood engraving, German reprint, 1857.

Since Etteilla’s 78 *lames* (blades, plates) or *feuilles* (leaves, sheets) constitute a book, he numbers them consecutively as though they were pages. However, the Fool card—which could have been page 22 or page 78—actually is labeled with a zero.

Etteilla’s suit-signs are distinctive. The Swords are straight, and the Batons are knotty. Those qualities recall Spanish playing cards. Etteilla probably was again influenced by *Monde Primitif*, which incorrectly

claimed Egyptian ancestry for the Tarot and for Spanish cards, too. Etteilla's Cup emblems are shallow goblets, evoking an Egyptian style. His Coins are better seen as astrological talismans, explicitly marked for the seven classical planets, plus the Head of the Dragon, the Tail of the Dragon, and the Part of Fortune.



Figure 8.2. Etteilla's substitute for the Juggler or Magician, wood engraving, German reprint, 1857.

Etteilla presumably linked his Tarot suits to the classical elements. The Deuces are visually explicit: the two Coins appear against billowing flames (fire), the two Swords against a clear atmosphere (air), the two Cups against a placid pool (water), the two Batons against craggy rocks (earth).

In depicting his court figures, Etteilla depended somewhat on the standard versions. For example, the Page of Cups still carries the towel or napkin of a waiter, as seen in the *T de M*. However, Etteilla has altered most of the figures so that they better conform to the themes given in *Monde Primitif*:

Batons = Peasant farmers

Cups = Clergy

Swords = Nobility

Coins = Merchants

The men in Etteilla's suit of Batons wear rustic clothes. In his suit of Cups, the King and Queen are crowned respectively as a high priest and priestess. Everyone in the Sword court wears expensive armor. The Coin figures all carry talismans marked with a glyph—⊗—denoting the astrological Part of Fortune, which predicts wealth and property. The figures for the Cups and Batons turn toward their right, while the other court figures turn toward their left. (More recently, designers of court cards in common decks have conceived of the same improvement: the poses can be regularized as a kind of supplement to the suit-signs. The figures usually derive from traditional patterns, but the profiles are "turned" where necessary for uniformity within a given suit.)

Appearing on each of Etteilla's cards, both above and below the image, are one or two key words. The lower inscriptions are properly inverted, although a few in the first edition are upright by the negligence of the engraver. The applicable label depends on whether the card is dealt right side up or upside down. The trump for Chaos has the subordinate label of "Etteilla" and stands for the male client. The trump for Rest also has the subordinate label of "Etteilla" but stands for the female client. Especially bewildering are the meanings that Etteilla gives to his numeral cards. We will examine them carefully in the ensuing chapters.

Last Years

In 1790, Etteilla issued more lessons under the title *Cours Théorique et Pratique du Livre de Thot* (*Theoretical and Practical Course on the Book of Thoth*, Paris). This no doubt emanated from his Nouvelle École de Magie (New School of Magic), which he founded in the summer. He issued *Apperçu sur la Nouvelle École de Magie* (*Prospectus on the New School of Magic*). He implies a definite rift with d'Odoucet, here called "Dodo" (not, in French, the name of the famously stupid bird, but the equivalent of the infantile "goo goo"). The teacher describes his student as ungrateful and "despising in tone." This may have been in response to d'Odoucet's *Révolution Française* (Paris, 1790), which contains a footnote critical of Etteilla and Hugand, although d'Odoucet suppresses their names. He adjudges Etteilla to be a neglectful husband and father, as well as a charlatan. Hugand is declared unskilled.¹⁷

Other tensions were evident in Etteilla's group. Three of Etteilla's disciples (de Bonrecueille, Hugand, de la Salette) had begun to compile the various interpretations of individual Tarot cards as they were emerging from Etteilla's circle. Etteilla had approved such a project but apparently did not coordinate it. The disciples worked separately. In 1790, de Bonrecueille felt compelled to write to de la Salette: "Brother Hugand has indeed received your epistle on the synonyms of the Book of Thoth, but according to the announcement made by Monsieur Etteilla, we had presumed that you had composed something more complete about it."¹⁸

The manuscript about the "synonyms" was printed anonymously as *Le Dictionnaire Synonymique du Livre de Thot* (*Synonymic Dictionary of the Book of Thoth*) in 1791. The text gives key terms for the upright and reversed meanings for each "hieroglyph," each also having the imagery, caption, and number as found in the Grand Etteilla. The book must have gained a certain approval: Hugand published the *Dictionnaire* in Lyons. In Paris, the publisher was "Etteilla fils," Etteilla's son, Louis-Jean-Baptiste Alliette.

Etteilla sustained his two great interests: democracy and cartomancy. In 1791, he published sixteen reformist pamphlets in quick succession. He also produced the "Petit Etteilla," not a booklet this time but a specialized

piquet deck. Each image, copied from the standard Parisian cards of that date, is reduced within a rectangular frame. The margins contain divinatory inscriptions, oriented to the frame line as a base line. Again we have an “upright” meaning and a “reversed” meaning. Side margins contain inscriptions with further meanings, should cards of equal rank happen to appear together. The meanings quite faithfully follow Etteilla’s books. The deck includes a special card that they recommended: a thirty-third card, called the “Etteilla.” This bears no picture but represents the client, equivalent to the Questioner in the Grand Etteilla. The piquet “Etteilla” has its own marginalia:

Top: “Behold what this Card signifies, flanked by the other Cards.”

Bottom: “At Etteilla’s, rue de Beauvais, Paris, 1791.”

Left: “This copy of the Book of Thoth is only intended for the art of reading cards.”

Right: “Behold the Book of Thoth whose price is 6 *livres*.”

Etteilla used the term “Book of Thoth” for both the Tarot and his piquet deck.

In August, Etteilla wrote a foreword to a short book, *Etteilla, ou l’Art de Lire dans les Cartes* (*Etteilla, or the Art of Reading Cards*, Paris, 1791). That was to be his last publication. Although 1791 had been a very productive year for Etteilla, he died on December twelfth. The cause of death is unknown. He was interred in the parish cemetery of St.-Germain-l’Auxerrois. Among the mourners were his son and the son’s landlord, a hairstylist named René Moussu.

Moussu’s career was the impetus for many confused descriptions of Etteilla as a hairdresser or wigmaker. This occupation is sometimes ascribed to Etteilla in order to diminish his credibility. This is an injustice to Etteilla and to hairdressers.

Aftermath

The year of Etteilla's death was turbulent for his disciples. De Bonrecueille, a government bureaucrat, was transferred from Lyons to Toulon. He persuaded Hugand to take over as "first pilot" of the Temple of the Sun. Hugand issued a twelve-page booklet, *Cartomancie, ou l'Art de Développer la Chaîne des Événemens de la Vie: Récréations Astrologique par le Livre de Thot* (*Cartomancy, or the Art of Developing the Succession of Life's Events: Astrological Recreation through the Book of Thoth*, Lyons, 1791). At the end of the year, Hugand must have been very conflicted. He was in line as Etteilla's successor. This seems to have been acknowledged by Etteilla's widow (perhaps not the estranged Jeanne Vatier, but Etteilla's later partner, a certain Élisabeth). Hugand was reluctant to relocate to Paris. In March of 1792, de Bonrecueille reported that d'Odoucet had seized Etteilla's private papers and was usurping Etteilla's role. We know, also, that d'Odoucet had acquired Etteilla's merchandise and was selling it. Thierry Depaulis owns forty cards from the first edition of the Grand Etteilla Tarot. In the margins of the Eight of Batons, where Etteilla had advertised himself, d'Odoucet has obliterated the engraving and has used a pen to insert his own name and address.¹⁹ Hugand soon decided to move to Paris. He and d'Odoucet struck a truce, despite their rivalry and the insults that d'Odoucet had hurled at Hugand and their teacher. With their mutual interest in publishing and printing, Hugand and d'Odoucet cooperated in running a small press, probably already founded by d'Odoucet. However, the collaboration dissolved by 1794. They must have been divided by politics, for Hugand, like Etteilla, had supported the Revolution. D'Odoucet defied the censors and published his criticism of successive regimes. For the rest of his career, his political opinions caused conflicts with the police. Hugand/Jéjalel disappeared after issuing his *Cours Complet, Théorique et Pratique du Livre de Thot* (*Complete Theoretical and Practical Course on the Book of Thoth*, Paris, 1794). It derives from Etteilla's *Cours Théorique et Pratique du Livre de Thot* (Paris, 1790).²⁰

The last substantial publication from Etteilla's circle was d'Odoucet's three-volume set, *Science des Signes: Médecine de l'Esprit* (*Science of*

Signs: Medicine for the Mind, Paris, 1804). That date may apply only to the first volume, with the others coming a few years later. Volume One derives from Etteilla's *Cours Théorique et Pratique du Livre de Thot*. Volume Two condenses the *Dictionnaire Synonymique*. Volume Three does not include the Tarot but dilates on other things occult, as well as Masonic. D'Odoucet disappeared from history in 1808 when the Prefect at Lille ordered a warrant for the royalist's arrest.²¹

Despite the occasional attention to the Grand Etteilla and a few derivative Tarots, its popularity steadily declined. Instead, the *T de M*, which had remained a favorite among game players, was elevated for cartomancy, esoteric studies, and magic. The *Marseille* trumps of course had pictures that the Tarotist could freely interpret. Etteilla's texts were not needed for that. Indeed, since he had imposed his peculiar order and content on his trumps, his texts were largely irrelevant to the older Tarots. However, the numeral cards of the *T de M* display only bland sets of undifferentiated suit-signs. Their interpretation requires guidelines, and Etteilla's were the only ones available. They were transferred to the *T de M*. This process mingled two esoteric traditions: (1) a Hermetic heritage (its details largely unrecognized) embodied in the imagery of the trumps and (2) a cabalistic heritage (its details largely unrecognized) embodied in the meanings of the numeral cards. That cabalism is the subject of the next three chapters.

Etteilla's Cartomancy



SOLITAIRE

Cards—probably *common* cards—were used for divination in 1765 in Ekaterinov, Russia. The witness was Giacomo Casanova.¹ He purchased a thirteen-year-old peasant girl, whom he renamed Zaïre (after the protagonist in Voltaire's drama, *Zaïre*). Casanova complained that whenever he returned home after a night of debauchery, the girl would confront him with his misdeeds, all discernible to her in a collocation of cards. He responded by forbidding them and throwing them into the fire. He does not tell us the nature of the deck, but he does say that Zaïre arranged her cards in a rectangle, 5 x 5. Her expertise strongly suggests that lower-class fortunetellers, rather than elite esoterists, disseminated the concepts and techniques of card reading as we know it.

Casanova's account possibly relates to a general practice in eighteenth-century France, where various games of *solitaire* sometimes had divinatory import. The 5 x 5 format is known in a game that uses the standard French deck. We cannot know whether the game is that utilized by Zaïre, but it is scarce enough that I will record it here. Vojtěch Omasta surveys the game along with other “Magische Reihen” but prosaically calls it “Monte-Carlo-Patience.”² (“Patience” is the European term for *solitaire*.) To receive a “yes” or “no” to a question, shuffle the 52 cards and systematically deal 25 of them, face up, in fulfillment of the 5 x 5 grid. Relieve it of cards two by two: the two must be matched, not by suit but by

rank, and they must be immediately adjacent along a shared vertical, horizontal, or diagonal. When all pairs have been removed, the empty spaces are filled by shifting cards in the layout. Regard them as lying in a continuous series, lined up like text—left to right and top to bottom. To fill each vacancy, import the next card in the series, and allow all the subsequent cards to tag along. Thus, the entire sequence stays in order but slides leftward and upward. The top of the grid is again replete with cards, but the bottom can receive new cards. Deal them sequentially from the shuffled deck. The process begins again. If all 52 cards eventually are paired, the oracle is positive.

Zaïre’s detailed reports went beyond solitaire’s yes-or-no response. She clearly derived something further from her formula. It could have presented some opportunity to interpret individual cards. As early as 1753, Etteilla had tapped a tradition for deciphering each of the piquet cards. I should note that Etteilla divined the future for his client (present during the divination), whereas Zaïre exercised a kind of clairvoyance, in order to satisfy her own curiosity about the absent Casanova.

ETTEILLA’S “SPREADS”

According to Etteilla, the French cartomancers of his youth dealt cards and read them strictly in the sequence given by the shuffled deck. Etteilla promoted various methods for laying out the cards in expressive arrays. They encourage the interpretation of cards in meaningful combinations. We have seen that the “Etteilla card” in the Petit Etteilla deck instructs readers to behold what the card signifies when flanked by other cards. Etteilla’s concept for the Tarot extends much further. Typically, his spreads give meanings not only to cards and groups of cards, but also to their positions in a prescribed configuration, such as a triangle for “past,” “present,” “future.” The signifiers thus have a syntax (the format) and a context (the question).

Etteilla describes a method of meditation with 54 cards in the layout.³ Mingle the full Tarot deck. Keeping the cards face down, deal to a row of three positions: right, middle, left (in that order). Each position, treated

equally, receives 26 cards. Reserve the middle packet for use later. Gather up the left and right packets, mingle them, then deal them to the same three positions (each receives 17 cards). One card remains in hand. Reserve the middle packet for use later. Gather the single card with the left and right packets, mingle them, then deal them to the same three positions (each receives 11 cards). Two cards remain in hand; they have no further function here. Reserve the middle packet, but set aside the remaining cards. Now, deal out the three reserved packets, ranking them in three separate lines, right to left. Reveal the faces of the cards. The three lines symbolize God (in the 26 cards), the Spirit (in the 17 cards), and the Body (in the 11 cards). Further information can be derived from each row by pairing its cards—the first with the last, the second with the second-last, and so on. Here we have an early example of the Tarot reading as a ritual. It does not suffice to shuffle the cards and then immediately deal out a few haphazard rows. Etteilla's preference for right-to-left sequences shows a respect for the writing of Hebrew. By dividing the deck into thirds, Etteilla was able to involve the highly symbolic number of 26. It is the total derived from the Hebrew name of God, *YHVH*, each letter having a numerical value (respectively 10 + 5 + 6 + 5). Later, we will study the cabalists' Tree of Life with its numbered spheres; the four central spheres are the first, the sixth, the ninth, the tenth. Their numbers (1 + 6 + 9 + 10) add up to 26. Etteilla's 26 cards, symbolizing God, come first; then they bear on the formation of the Spirit, which then bears on the formation of the Body. A variation on this spread was published by S. L. Mathers in 1888.⁴ In the same year, he cofounded the Order of the Golden Dawn. The spread appeared again in the Order's teachings.

Another of Etteilla's arrangements also utilizes cards in pairs, 33 of them.⁵ First, Etteilla's "Questioner" card ("Chaos" for a man; "Rest" for a woman) is situated to mark the center of the array. This card and all subsequent cards will face upward. Shuffle the remainder of the deck. Symmetrically surround the Questioner card with 33 others: 11 in a column rising on the right, 11 in a column rising on the left, 11 across the top (from right to left). A complement of 33 cards will be dealt within the square and will form a circle. Start building the circle just to the right of its nadir and proceed counterclockwise. Set aside the 11 unused cards.

Read the oracle by taking the cards in pairs. To divine the past, pair the cards in the right-hand column with those in the adjacent arc of 11 cards (proceed from bottom to top). To divine the present, pair the cards in the upper row with those in the upper arc of 11 cards (proceed from right to left). To divine the future, pair the cards in the left-hand column with those in the adjacent arc of 11 cards (proceed from bottom to top). Etteilla says that the combinations of cards may prove to be complex and may require advice from his books.

Still more ambitious is a format of a spoked wheel that uses all 78 cards in a “horoscope.”⁶ In Etteilla’s Tarot, he has marked the first 12 cards with glyphs for the zodiacal signs. Arrange those cards in a circle, placing the current sun-sign in House One and placing the other 11 cards in the natural order of the signs. Shuffle the remaining cards and deal them to the houses, One through Twelve. Continue round and round, building 12 radii out from the central circle. (The last 6 cards are dealt to the odd-numbered houses. Thus, symmetry is maintained, however arbitrarily.) Etteilla expects us to interpret all the cards attached to every house! Pay special attention to the Coin cards, for they are marked as planets and other celestial powers. An astrologer can relate them to each other and to the zodiacal signs. Etteilla again finds a way to consider these cards in pairs. He preposterously requires that each card be interpreted in tandem with the card that lies directly across the circle, equidistant from the center. This “astrological” spread would need abridgment to be practical.⁷

Etteilla’s penchant for the pairing of cards looks to me like an influence from the old divinatory use of solitaire. Indeed, the game could have been his inspiration for the creation of “spreads.” They have become a fundamental feature of Tarot readings, and variations are used by Tarotists everywhere.

ETTEILLA'S PIQUET CARTOMANCY (ca. 1753)

(R = Reversed)

	Diamonds	Hearts	Spades	Clubs
King	Man	Blond man	<u>Man of the law</u> R: Widowed man	Brunet man
Queen	Lady	Blonde lady	<u>Worldly lady</u> R: Widowed lady	Brunette lady
Jack	Soldier	Blond youth	<u>Messenger</u> R: Sightseer	Brunet youth
Ace	Letters, news	Bottle, table	<u>Love</u> R: Pregnancy	Much money
10	Gold (near evil Spades: Anger)	Town	Tears	House
9	Delay	Victory	<u>Ecclesiastic</u> R: Mourning	Gift
8	Countryside	Blonde girl	Illness	Brunette girl
7	Gossip	Sentiment	Hope	Money

ETTEILLA'S RESEARCH INTO INDIVIDUAL CARDS

Etteilla, when only fourteen or fifteen, began to gather and combine the fortunetelling practiced by his older contemporaries who used the piquet deck. He published the results. The actual tables seem not to have survived, but they are preserved in an anonymous anthology, *Le Bohémien* (*The Gypsy*, Paris, 1797), now very rare. Most of Etteilla's Spades have alternative meanings, depending on whether the card is upright or inverted ("reversed"—here keyed as "R"). Reversals were generally apparent because card designs were not yet double-ended. The figures were full length, and the suit-signs clearly pointed up or down, with the exception of the numeral cards in the Diamond suit (where, indeed, confusion sometimes occurred).

Another scheme from the same anthology gives different meanings. They probably represent something of the popular interpretations that

Etteilla felt obliged to correct. They are especially interesting for the inclusion of meanings for all of the cards when “reversed.”

Following this tabulation, the text (quite superfluously) defines cards in a few combinations. For instance, “Ace of Cups, preceded by the Ten of Clubs, would say *abundant money*; if the Eight of Clubs immediately accompanies a King or Queen, that would say *declaration of love*.” These groups of cards are minimal sequences. They are not yet the intricate constellations of Etteilla’s spreads.

Etteilla’s thoughts on common cartomancy culminated in his *Petit Etteilla* deck. It was published in 1791. However, these meanings already appeared in Etteilla’s book of 1770. Here too are secondary meanings for all cards when reversed.

All significations are printed in the margins of the cards. A reproduction pack was published by France Cartes (1994). In that deck, the upright Eight of Clubs is “Blonde girl,” but this is likewise given for the Eight of Hearts. For the Eight of Clubs, Etteilla really intended “Brunette girl,” as seen in his earliest notes. I would interpret “brunet/brunette” as *black-haired*, “chestnut” as *brownish*.

LATER PIQUET (ca. 1770?)

(R = Reversed)

	Diamonds	Hearts	Spades	Clubs
Ace	Great news	Happy home	Lawsuit, pregnancy	Money
R	Letter, note	Unhappy home	Letter, trinket	Love
King	Soldier, brunet	Executive, blond	Man of the law	Loyalty
R	Rural man	Good-hearted man	Dishonest man	Uneasiness
Queen	Traitoress	Good lady, blonde	Widow	Loving lady
R	Rural lady	Good lady	Dishonest lady	Jealous lady
Jack	Traitor	Youth, blond	Traitor	Loyal man
R	Servant	Thoughts of a blond	Illness	Indecision
10	Country	Glad meal	Boredom	Fortune
R	Anger	Sad meal	Tears	Love
9	Travel	Victory	Death	Money
R	Delay	Great victory	Prison	Fortune's wheel
8	Progress	Blonde girl	Wild grief	Vow of love
R	Progress	Great joy	Disquiet	Jealousy
7	Quarrel	Blond child	Brunette girl	Brunet child
R	Gossip	Child	Gossip	Illegitimate

PETIT ETTEILLA DECK

R = Reversed

	Diamonds	Hearts	Spades	Clubs
Kings	A man	Blond man	Man of the law	Brunet man
R	A man	Chestnut blond man	Widower	Chestnut brunet man
Queens	A woman	Blonde woman	Widow	Brunette woman
R	A woman	Chestnut blonde woman	Worldly woman	Chestnut brunette woman
Jacks	Soldier	Blond boy	Courier	Brunet boy
R	Servant	Chestnut blond boy	Spy	Chestnut brunet boy
Ace	Letters	Present	Trinket	Purse
R	Note	Gain	Enjoyment	Nobility
10	Gold	Town	Tears	House
R	Betrayal	Inheritance	Losses	Lover
9	Delay	Victory	Priest	Effects
R	Enterprise	Boredom	Illness	A present
8	Countryside	Blonde girl	Illness	Brunette girl
R	Sorrow	Chestnut blonde girl	Nun	Chestnut brunette girl
7	Gossip	Thought	Hope	Money
R	Birth	Desires	Friendship	Embarrassment

I urge a close examination of Etteilla's common cartomancy, for it is clearly fundamental to his Tarot cartomancy, which has influenced Tarot cartomancy worldwide: the Petit Etteilla preserves the basis for most of the meanings attributed to the upright numeral cards in the Grand Etteilla.

In assigning meanings to the Tarot's suit cards, Etteilla made his Diamonds into Batons, his Hearts into Cups, his Spades into Swords, his Clubs into Coins. Usually, the upright Tens, Nines, Eights, Sevens in the French suits correspond to the same numerals in the Tarot. Usually, the reversed Tens, Nines, Eights, Sevens in the French suits respectively correspond to the upright Fives, Fours, Threes, Twos in the equivalent Tarot suits. (A misalignment would seem to have occurred when Diamonds were converted into Batons. However, this will later be understandable as the correction of confusion that had previously resided in the cartomantic piquet.) The Aces in Etteilla's Tarot apparently have their own source(s).⁸ Etteilla necessarily found or invented meanings for his Knights, which do not exist as court rankings in common French cards. Etteilla's Sixes also required some special effort. Together the Sixes hint at an interesting symmetry: past vs. present; at home vs. abroad (more of this later).

CONFUSING SUIT-SIGNS

We have seen how, ca. 1770, Etteilla "had reflected, studied and finally recognized that the false art of drawing cards came from the most useful and sublime of sciences." I take this to mean that he credited the piquet pack (somewhat false) with having preserved something of a forgotten Tarot (utterly sublime). When he designed his own Tarot, he distributed the cartomantic meanings of the piquet across the new suit cards. He was not being opportunistic; he was being conscientious. He must have thought that he was reconstituting a Tarot tradition. I believe that he succeeded.

UPRIGHT SUITS IN THE GRAND ETTEILLA

	Batons	Cups	Swords	Coins
King	Rural gentleman	Blond man	Lawyer	Brunet man
Queen	Rural lady	Blonde lady	Widowhood	Brunette lady
Knight	Departure	Arrival	Military	Usefulness
Page	Foreigner	Blond youth	Spy	Brunet youth
10	Betrayal	Town	Tears	House
9	Delay	Victory	Ecclesiastic	Effects
8	Countryside	Blonde girl	Crisis	Brunette girl
7	Negotiations	Thought	Hope	A little money
6	Domestic	The past	Route	The present
5	Gold	Inheritance	Loss	Lover
4	Society	Boredom	Solitude	A present
3	Enterprise	Success	Separation	Nobility
2	Sorrow	Love	Friendship	Embarrassment
Ace	Birth	Table	Extreme	Perfect joy

Let me be explicit about this amazing sequence of events. Where did Etteilla get the content for his Tarot suits? I answer: from the older piquet. Where did the older piquet deck get that content? I answer: *from an even older Tarot!* The events are amazing because meanings in the older Tarot were quite *systematically* preserved in the piquet, *and* Etteilla somehow understood the system. He then could work his way back to the old Tarot cartomancy. Without Etteilla's work, both as an adult and as a teenager, the details of this system would have dropped from the historical record. Moreover, this system, although forgotten, is the foundation of modern cartomancy.

Part of this transmission is clearly reported by the Comte de Mellet, the contributor to Court de Gébelin's *Monde Primitif*. De Mellet wrote: "Our fortune-tellers, not knowing how to read the hieroglyphs, have subtracted all the pictures and have changed the names of Cups, Batons, Coins and Swords,...substituting those of Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs and Spades."⁹ De Mellet presumably refers to French cartomancers. Their knowledge of the Italian suits probably derived from the *Tarot de*

Marseille or some variation. A rejection of the intriguing trumps and courts may seem peculiar nowadays, but it would be explainable if “our fortune-tellers” were Jewish cabalists or their beneficiaries. Conservative Jews indeed could have disdained graven images and could have preferred to work with numbers and nondescript suit-signs.

In any event, modern scholars have too sweepingly dismissed the writings of de Mellet and of Etteilla. Some of their testimony is worth examining. What do they say about the meanings of the suits? In *Monde Primitif*, de Mellet gives these equations for the French suits:

Diamonds = Countryside
Hearts = Joy
Spades = Sorrow
Clubs = Money

Those are the suit-signs that Etteilla had recorded nearly thirty years earlier. De Gébelin and de Mellet, we know, assigned the Italian suits to four classes of society:

Batons = Peasants
Cups = Ecclesiastics
Swords = Nobles
Coins = Merchants

Which symbolism for the suit-signs came first, the Italian or the French? The French system lacks symmetry. Inasmuch as Joy and Sorrow are complementary, we might have expected *City* to balance Country, or *Poverty* to balance Money. Moreover, the French suit-signs are not clearly expressive. Granted, Hearts might be decoded as Joy, although *Love* or *Courage* would do better. The related signs are still less cooperative. Is Sorrow obvious in a leaf shape (♠)? Is the trefoil (♣) a very good emblem of Money? How can a Diamond express Countryside? This French system is surely a forced adaptation of the Italian suits. When we grant primacy to the Italian signs, we find sense and symmetry after all:

INTERPRETATIONS OF SUIT SIGNS

Levels/Shift	Batons	Cups	Swords	Coins
1. originally	Sticks for the Moon	Cups for Venus	Swords for Mars	Gold for the Sun
2. reduced to	Staves for peasants	Chalices for priests	Weapons for knights	Coins for merchants
3. reassigned	Diamonds for country	Hearts for joy	Spades for sorrow	Clubs for money

The shift from level 1 to level 2 occurred in the Italian Renaissance, as the Tarot designers assimilated the suits from the Middle East and Christianized the symbolism. (I surmise that the original astrology was known to some, including the Tarot's inventors.) The shift from level 2 to level 3 occurred in eighteenth-century France, as cartomancers adapted the Italian suits to the French suits. (Those French cartomancers almost certainly worked without any knowledge of the earlier evolution of the Tarot trumps or suits.)

The French Diamonds are countrified since they borrow their meanings from the Staves, which belonged to peasants or pilgrims in the countryside. The Hearts are joyous because of divine love, also symbolized by the chalice of the priests. Spades are sorrowful, having received their symbolism from the knights' deadly weapons. The Clubs signify money, as they are substitutes for the merchant's coins. Four of Etteilla's individual cards conform exactly to the suits' prescribed themes: Countryside, Love, Tears, and Money. They appear in appropriate suits in his *Petit Etteilla* and *Grand Etteilla*. But what principle favored four particular cards with those themes, when each theme was supposed to cover a whole suit? And how do we explain the many other numeral cards, which have entirely different themes? My following text will gradually construct a comprehensive program.

Late in Etteilla's life, when some of his students were separately compiling "dictionaries" of card meanings, something caused disagreement. In February of 1791, Charles de Bonrecueille wrote to Etteilla: "You will find here enclosed the manuscript of our estimable competitor Monsieur de la Salette. There are many synonyms [for individual Tarot cards] whose fortunate conjunctions I have admired. However, there are many others that I do not think are at their natural

places. Either he is wrong or I am; but it is true that the work is very helpful, and—for fear it would not be printed—I made a copy of it.”¹⁰

Those Tarotists seem to have been trying to establish an integrated system. On what basis could they have agreed or disagreed? Perhaps they were somewhat undecided about the exact way in which the piquet deck should be unfolded to reconstruct the earlier Tarot. This effort could have been especially challenging if Etteilla’s disciples were continuously surveying the popular use of the piquet deck. Variations must have been rampant. Furthermore, we have yet to settle another question: where did Etteilla discover meanings for his inverted Tarot cards? He was silent about specific sources. He must have been reticent with his own disciples, for, as late as 1791, he permitted de Bonrecueille and de la Salette to squabble over basics. One possibility is that Etteilla was sworn to silence about the foundations of cartomancy. This suggests an initiate’s vow to his superiors, maybe cabalists. Was Etteilla’s Piedmontese teacher a cabalist? I wish I knew.

CABALISM IN ETTEILLA’S CIRCLE

Etteilla’s expertise in authentic cabalism is difficult to judge. Might Hebrew have been his inspiration for lettering his family name from right to left? As previously observed, Etteilla made cabalistic allusions in some of his cartomantic spreads. In his books, he makes many incidental asides about the cabala, although he never gives us pointed instructions in it.

The cabala certainly attracted Claude Hugand, Etteilla’s best pupil in all of France. He borrowed his “magical” name, Jéjalel, from the Hebrew *Shem ha-Mephorash*. This will offer a specific example of the intricacies of the cabala. The book reveals the components of the “Articulated Name of God” and presents them as angels. The cabalists closely examined three consecutive Bible verses, Exodus 14:19–21. They are of equal length, each having seventy-two letters. The verses were combined in an orderly way to form three-letter groups, which then served as roots for seventy-two sacred names.¹¹ The cabalists found the same roots in other verses (one from the beginning of Genesis and the remainder from Psalms). The

nature of each verse helped to define the nature of the related angel. Authorities somewhat disagree on the results beyond the first angel. In that instance, Exodus yields the root *VHV*, which is developed into the name Vahaviah or something similar. The root also appears in Psalm 3:3, which says, “But You, oh Lord, are...the lifter of my head.” Vahaviah is an angel of wisdom. Hugand gives his guardian spirit as Jéjalel. Other authors give Ieialel, Yeialel, Yeyalel, etc. (The letters *I*, *J*, and *Y* can be used interchangeably.) Most authors relate this angel to Psalm 6:3 but do not necessarily agree on his character. He usually appears fifty-eighth among the seventy-two. However, Hugand situates Jéjalel in the fortieth place.¹² Hugand attributes this modified list to “Palingène,” meaning Marcellus Palingenius, author of *Zodiacus Vitae* (Basel, 1543).

One slender reference suggests that Etteilla had personal contact with a Jewish cabalist or with a Jew who had some contact with cabalists. Christopher McIntosh refers to an alchemical diagram that bears this notation: “Qabalistic and Hermetic picture found in the possession of a Jew in 1772 by Alliette.”¹³ McIntosh fails to cite an archival location. He says that the page is part of a manuscript, *La Clef de Sapience des Frères de la Rose Croix* (*The Key to the Wisdom of the Brothers of the Rose-Cross*). The manuscript was found among the papers of Mary Gebhard, one of Éliphas Lévi’s students. Was the page an intrinsic part of the manuscript or merely interleaved with it? The latter seems more probable. The page may have been preserved by Lévi, who indeed knew of occultist papers that Etteilla possessed but never published.¹⁴

CABALISM IN ETTEILLA’S COURT CARDS

In the previous chapter, we learned that Etteilla linked his suits to the classical elements. They were staple items in the “Christian Cabala.” Here are some of the codifications given by Agrippa.¹⁵

Elements	Fire	Air	Water	Earth
Humors	Gall	Blood	Phlegm	Bile
Temperaments	Choleric	Sanguine	Phlegmatic	Melancholic
Name of God [YHVH]	<i>Yod</i>	<i>Heh</i>	<i>Vau</i>	<i>Heh</i>

The Hebrew letters are of special interest because they have a fixed order. It can be aligned with the order of Etteilla's Tarot cards. (Remember that he numbered them like pages in the "Book of Thoth.") The Coins (cards 77–64) would align with *Yod*, Swords (63–50) with *Heh*, Cups (49–36) with *Vau*, Batons (35–22) with the second *Heh*. Those Hebrew letters can be used to symbolize the archetypal human ([figure 9.1](#)). *Yod* forms the head (cf. mind and the fiery intellect), *Heh* becomes the arms and chest (cf. the vital spirit and air), *Vau* is the torso (cf. the internal organs and water), the second *Heh* supplies the hips and legs (cf. their footing, i.e., earth). This sequence of elements proceeds nicely from the lightest at the top to the heaviest at the bottom. However, different correspondences between the elements and the four-letter name are known.¹⁶ Whatever the correct correspondences, they would seem to do little in differentiating the cards within a given suit. We must explore further.



Figure 9.1. The letters of the sacred name YHVH (Yod-Heh-Vau-Heh) arranged in an anthropomorphic image.

The four elements, in the human body, were supposed to manifest themselves as humors: fiery gall, airy blood, watery phlegm, earthy bile. The dominance of one of the humors was thought to induce a distinct temperament (see the above table). These types also had characteristic complexions: jaundice from gall, ruddiness from blood, paleness from phlegm, darkness from black bile. (“Complexion” originally referred to the mixture of humors.) The theory of complexions may have been the basis for the brunets and the blonds so prominent in the court cards in French cartomancy. The brunets and the blonds sometimes occupy the black suits and the red suits, respectively. I have not pursued this potential, because sources are few and yet inconsistent.

Etteilla accommodated most of his Tarot’s court figures to the social classes given in *Monde Primitif*. He blended that symbolism with the meanings for the old piquet courts. Thus, the piquet’s King of Diamonds, as “the man,” became Etteilla’s King of Batons, as “a man of the country.” The piquet’s King and Queen of Hearts remained “blond man” and “blonde woman” in Etteilla’s interpretation of his King and Queen of Cups. Actually, no coiffures appear, since they are hidden by headdresses—those of a priest and a priestess—so depicted because of the ecclesiastical status of Cups. The piquet courts and the Tarot courts do not seem parallel in their symbolism. I think that Etteilla should have resisted blending the two traditions but rather should have chosen one and then restored it fully.

A similar problem appears in Etteilla’s trumps. He tried to accommodate systems that are comparable in general but different in their details.

CABALISM IN ETTEILLA’S TRUMP CARDS

I do not endorse Etteilla’s tampering with the trump order and symbolism. Nevertheless, I will explain his first eight trumps for the sake of their cabalism. His first trump is Chaos and receives the numeral 1. For the subsequent seven cards, he gives alternative numerals, as noted below.

Trump 2 (2) [1] derives from the traditional Sun trump and shows an energetic star above two nude children greeting each other in front of an antique monument.

Trump 3 (1) [3] greatly resembles the *Marseille* Moon, with the orb above a watery landscape occupied by two towers, two dogs, and a sadly mutated crayfish.

Trump 4 (3) [2], like the *Marseille* Star, shows a nude woman in an airy landscape where she kneels and empties two ewers. Etteilla adds glyphs for the planets, hovering with a star and a sun (?) having a star-shaped center.

Trump 5 (4) [6] modifies the *Marseille* World to depict Isis between two pyramids (imaginatively modeled on the *Tarot de Besançon*). Here she is encircled not by a wreath but the ouroboros, the tail-biting serpent, an Egyptian symbol for eternity and the boundaries of the universe. (So says Horapollo. See the *Hieroglyphica*, I, 2.) In Etteilla's card, the surrounding tetramorphs have glyphs for four zodiacal signs: Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, Aquarius.

Trump 6 [4] is one of Etteilla's completely novel trumps. It shows the sun, moon, and stars.

Trump 7 [5] is also a trump invented for Etteilla's Tarot: birds, sea creatures, and a snake respectively inhabit zones for sky, water, and earth.

Trump 8 [7] is Etteilla's card for the female client and shows a nude woman in a landscape. She is Eve, in the Garden of Eden.

If we consider the cards' secondary numbers (2, 1, 3, 4) and rearrange those cards as 1, 2, 3, 4, they follow the elements (water, fire, air, earth) as they emerge in the Creation story in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. If we use the numbers in square brackets, the cards follow the biblical story of Creation, which ends with humans in Eden. What is the primary sequence? It illustrates a related progression contrived by cabalists. This requires explanation.

Cabalists found alternative ways of aligning the days of the week with the spheres of the Tree of Life. (A detailed discussion of the Tree is deferred until the next chapter.) Etteilla used a traditional arrangement. The top three spheres are set aside as the generators of the seven others. Those lower spheres are viewed as parallel to the seven days. In various developments of the scheme, the days are sometimes related to the

planets.¹⁷ Etteilla relies on a system that cabalists adopted from an ancient civilization. The Babylonians linked the days to the seven planetary deities. The system became universal among Jews and Christians, and it remains embedded in different cultures and different languages. Here I will list the French names for the days of the week. (Etteilla, of course, knew the associations between the days and the deities.) The French names spring mostly from the Roman pantheon. The English names spring mostly from the Germanic equivalents of the Roman deities.

ETTEILLA'S CABALISTIC TRUMPS (#2–8)

Trump Image	Cabalistic Sphere	Day/Deity
2. Sun and attentive infants	<i>Chesed</i> , Loving-kindness	<i>dimanche</i> (Sunday = Sun's day) Sol (healthful, positive)
3. Moonstruck animals	<i>Pachad</i> , Fear	<i>lundi</i> (Monday = Moon's day) Luna (erratic, maddening)
4. Maiden in springtime	<i>Tiphereth</i> , Beauty	<i>mardi</i> (Tuesday = Tiu's day) Mars (a god of spring. Cf. March.)
5. Isis and cherubim	<i>Netzach</i> , Endurance	<i>mercredi</i> (Wednesday = Woden's day) Mercury (Divine Mind)
6. Orbs and orbits	<i>Hod</i> , Honor, Majesty	<i>jeudi</i> (Thursday = Thor's day) Jupiter (sky god, king of gods)
7. Denizens of sea	<i>Yesod</i> ,	<i>vendredi</i> (Friday = Freya's)

and sky	Foundation, Fertility	day) Venus (fertility goddess)
8. Eve in Eden	<i>Shekinah</i> , God's feminine Spirit	<i>samedi</i> (Saturday = Saturn's day) Saturn (patron of Jews)

I will not proceed with an analysis of Etteilla's subsequent trumps. They too defy all precedents for numbering them. I am not sure that I comprehend his thinking. More important, they have not influenced modern Tarotism, which largely observes the correct trump order, preserved in the *T de M*.

Etteilla did not succeed in restoring a traditional system for his court cards. He went further astray in redesigning and rearranging the trumps. However, his assistance with the numeral cards proves invaluable. They indeed were infused with the authentic cabala. It supplied meanings for all of Etteilla's numeral cards, and those meanings have infiltrated cartomancy everywhere. Given their mystery and their ubiquity, I grant them an entire chapter ([chapter 11](#)).

LA CABALE

Here I have a few inquiries of French-speaking Tarotists. I know that a term for solitaire was *la Cabale* (with variations outside of France). When did the term originate? Inasmuch as "cabala" had become a synonym for "practical magic," I suspect that *la Cabale* was so called because games of solitaire had divinatory uses. Could the very name have prompted de Gébelin and Etteilla to look beyond piquet cartomancy and begin a flirtation with cabalism? Or was the prompting quite the opposite: did the term *Cabale*, for solitaire, arise only after de Gébelin and Etteilla promoted the belief that cards were cabalistic?

Part Four



Theory: Cabalism and the Standard Tarot

Cards and Cabalism



A SLIGHT CLUE

I wrote a small book about a modern Tarot painted and published by Luigi Scapini.¹ I noticed that Scapini was well acquainted with the cartomancy of Etteilla. I was also able to apply several relevant quotations from the *Sha'are Orach* (*Gates of Light*), a cabalistic study written by Joseph Gikatilla (1248–1325?), a Spanish rabbi. Only later did I consider the interconnections: to a large extent, Scapini *knowingly* depended on Etteilla; to an even larger extent, Etteilla *unknowingly* depended on Gikatilla. Now I am ready to extend this line of thought. Insofar as modern cartomancy is indebted to Etteilla, it is also indebted to Gikatilla. The latter could not have been a cartomancer. Playing cards had not arrived in Europe during his lifetime. But his book could have supplied the basis for a cartomantic system centuries after his death.

SOURCE OF THE “UPRIGHT” NUMERALS

Tarotists usually conduct their “readings” by remembering key terms for their cards. Invariably we are told that those indicators are adaptable, and many additional thoughts can proceed from the basic ideas. Etteilla concurred. Sometimes his ideas have unexpected connotations and associations. Paul Huson has translated the extensive assortment of

meanings that Etteilla’s circle bestowed on each card.² The following chart is deliberately brief so that a quick glance will substantiate a simple point: by exercising a small degree of selectivity, the suits nearly balance—two for blessings and two for afflictions.

ETTEILLA’S EXTENSION OF KEY TERMS				
Card#	Batons	Cups	Swords	Coins
10	Betrayal, Ruse, Cheat	Town, Residence	Tears, Affliction	Savings, House, Lineage
9	Delay, Slowdown	Victory, Achievement	Hermit, Cult	Effects, Realization
8	Countryside, Battlefield	Blonde girl, Honor	Crisis, Criticism	Brunette girl, Mystery of Mysteries
7	Negotiations, Babble	Thought, Opinion	Hope, Scheme	Money, Purity
6	Domestic, Slave, Inferior	The past, Antiquity	Route, March, Expedient	The present, Now
5	Gold, Anger (see charts, chapter 9)	Inheritance, Gift	Loss, Destruction	Lover, Affinity
4	Society, Mob	Boredom, Concern	Solitude, Exile	A present, Tip
3	Enterprise, Effort	Success, Outcome	Separation, Division	Nobility, Renown
2	Sorrow, Disagreement	Love, Sympathy	Friendship, Attachment	Embarrassment, Embroilment
Ace	Birth, Source	Table, Abundance	Extreme, Fury	Perfect joy, Solar cure

Negative “Boredom” (for the Four of Cups) can become a potentially positive “Concern.” Positive “Hope” (for the Seven of Swords) can become a potentially negative “Scheme.” To be candid, I must admit that not all of these extended meanings really point to the essential significance of the cards as I have come to understand them. Some of the extended meanings could be uninformed tangents that point in the wrong directions. Which ones are valid? We need to establish the principles that underlie the Tarot’s numeral cards. I theorize that the principles were cabalistic.

In the previous chapter, I coordinated seven of Etteilla’s trumps with the days of the week and a sequence of “spheres.” In Hebrew, they are called *sephiroth*, a word related to *saphar*, “to count.” They are first referenced in the exotic *Sepher Yetzirah* (*Book of Formation*), which dates

from about 600. Some of the book's components are centuries older. It originated in Palestine or further east. The *Sepher Yetzirah* presents the *sephiroth* as the numbers One to Ten. These, in Hebrew, are denoted by the first ten letters of the alphabet, *Aleph* to *Yod*. The relationship to language is important, for the Bible represents God as creating the world through spoken commands. The *sephiroth* were the very stages from Chaos to Creation. Some esoterists assume that the *Sepher Yetzirah* meant to encourage readers to use secret language to conjure their own creations. The book applies the *sephiroth* to the human body, the calendar, and the cosmos. These ideas were adopted and extended by the first cabalists, in medieval Europe. For some, the *sephiroth* were emanations of God. Gikatilla referred to the *sephiroth* as divine "intelligences," but they are also the "gates" in his *Gates of Light*. For the contemplative mystic, they define a pathway by which devoted humans can commune with God and *vice versa*.

The *sephiroth* are arranged in a hierarchy. Highest is *Kether* (Crown). It has a divine status, close to the Godhead, and is virtually beyond description. Slightly lower than *Kether* are *Chokmah* (Wisdom) and *Binah* (Understanding). The seven lower *sephiroth* derived their oldest names from scripture: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness [*Gedulah*] and the power [*Gevurah*], and the glory [*Tiphereth*], and the victory [*Netzach*], and the majesty [*Hod*]; for all [*Kol*] that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom [*Malkuth*]" (I Chronicles 29:11). Some of these have further connotations: *Tiphereth* can be translated as Beauty, *Netzach* as Eternity, *Hod* as Honor. The fourth *sephirah* can be *Chesed* (Loving-kindness); the fifth can be *Din* (Judgment); the sixth can be *Rachamim* (Compassion). The ninth *sephirah* is most often called *Yesod* (Foundation). *Malkuth* is identified with the *Shekinah* (God's Spirit among the community of the faithful: this *sephirah* is the sphere of human habitation).

The direct hierarchy of the *sephiroth* achieves still greater complexity by their formulation as the "Tree of Life" (see [figure 10.1](#)). It is variously conceptualized.³ It entails three columns. Spheres 3–5–8 are the column of severity (sphere 5 is also called *Pachad*, "Fear"). Sphere 5 sends its influence down to sphere 8, which administers justice. Spheres 2–4–7 are

the column of mercy (sphere 4 is Loving-kindness or, indeed, Mercy). Sphere 4 sends its influence down to sphere 7, which answers prayers. Spheres 1–6–9–10 are the central column. It reconciles the flanking columns of severity and mercy.

Besides the Tree's columns, its *sephiroth* are grouped in triangles: 1–2–3 as the realm of the intellect, 4–5–6 as the realm of morality, 7–8–9 as the realm of nature.⁴

The Tree of Life offers another pattern: horizontal levels. They are discussed less often than the pillars and the triads. Four levels are marked by the lone *sephiroth* that stand along the central column: *Kether*, *Tiphereth*, *Yesod*, *Malkuth*. *Tiphereth* can be regarded as the Tree's central level. It is concerned with orientation, both spatial and temporal (in certain planetary correlations, *Tiphereth* corresponds to the sun—glorious and beautiful, but also a reference point in space and time). The remaining levels on the Tree have two *sephiroth* apiece. The level of *Chokmah-Binah* is “the Path of Love.” The level of *Chesed-Din* is the location of “the Heavenly Court.” The level of *Netzach-Hod* is “the Place of Counsel.”

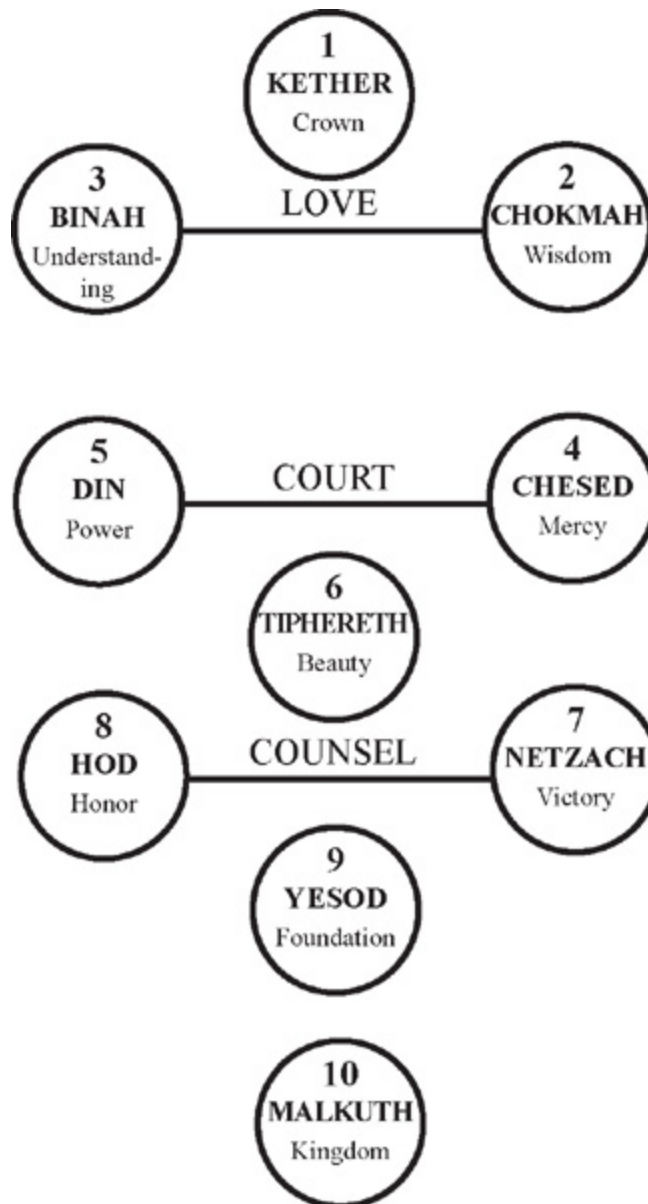


Figure 10.1. The Cabalistic Tree of Life showing the ten *sephiroth*.

I previously remarked that Hermetism and cabalism absorbed a degree of Pythagoreanism. The mystical Decad surely underlies the quantity of *sephiroth*. In both the Decad and the *sephiroth*, Unity exhibits perfection, whereas the other numbers successively involve undesirable multiplicity, confusion, and accident. The Tarotist reasonably could expect that the symbolism of the Tree of Life somewhat resembles the Tarot trumps, which certainly include the Decad. A few examples are clear when we consider more terminology. The seventh *sephirah* is Endurance and also

Victory, while the seventh trump is Triumph or Victory. The eighth *sephirah* is Honor and also Justice, while the eighth trump is Balance or Justice. Let me emphasize that these connections do not establish the Tree as the source of the trump symbolism. The two systems are separate. They display similarities only because of a mutual dependence on the Pythagoreans. For the most part, the Hermetists and the cabalists brought significantly different developments to the Decad.

The Tree has no direct connection to the Tarot trumps, but it is the very foundation for the cartomantic meanings of the numeral cards.

With further study of the cabala, the above meanings acquire depth and clarity. The Path of Love covers all the Tarot's Twos and Threes: here we find emotional attachments and estrangements. The Heavenly Court covers our Fours and Fives: they potentially relate to legal rights and settlements. Furthermore, *Din* (the fifth sphere) is associated with gold as an award of the Court. "Gold" appears in Etteilla's earliest notes for his Ten of Diamonds (later restored as the Five of Batons). The space/time attribute of *Tiphereth* (the sixth sphere) is entirely relevant to the Sixes in the Tarot suits: "here," "previously," "there," "currently." The Place of Counsel, at the level of *Netzach* and *Hod*, receives the decrees of the Court and implements them. Those spheres (7 and 8) are patrons of communication, including prophecies, prayers, and thanksgiving for victory in war. (Remember that Victory itself belongs to this level.)

We can consult authors who elucidate the Tree of Life and emphasize the levels (as distinct from the triads and the pillars). I know of no better authority than Gikatilla. In fact, *all of the numeral cards can be aligned systematically with key words in Gikatilla's major work.*

CARDS ALIGNED WITH SEPHIROTH

Tens = *Malkuth*, the level of **community** (place and governance)

10 Batons: betrayal	10 Cups: residence	10 Swords: affliction	10 Coins: lineage
Nines = <i>Yesod</i>, the level of individuality (self and circumstances)			
9 Batons: slowdown	9 Cups: success	9 Swords: hermit, cult	9 Coins: realization
Eights and Sevens = <i>Hod</i> and <i>Netzach</i>, level of Counsel			
8 Batons: battlefield	8 Cups: honor	8 Swords: crisis	8 Coins: mystery
7 Batons: conference	7 Cups: thought	7 Swords: wish	7 Coins: silver, purity
Sixes = <i>Tiphereth</i>, central to time and space			
6 Batons: domestic (here)	6 Cups: previously	6 Swords: voyage (there)	6 Coins: currently
Fives and Fours = <i>Din</i> and <i>Chesed</i>, level of the Heavenly Court			
5 Batons: gold	5 Cups: inheritance	5 Swords: loss	5 Coins: affinity
4 Batons: covenant	4 Cups: concern	4 Swords: solitude	4 Coins: gift
Threes and Twos = <i>Binah</i> and <i>Chokmah</i>, the Path of Love			
3 Batons: effort	3 Cups: outcome	3 Swords: separation	3 Coins: renown
2 Batons: sorrow	2 Cups: love	2 Swords: attachment	2 Coins: obstacle
Aces = <i>Kether</i>, the supreme sephirah			
Ace Batons: birth	Ace Cups: abundance	Ace Swords: fury	Ace Coins: joy

ETTEILLA'S NUMERAL CARDS WITH "REVERSALS"

R = Reversed

	Batons	Cups	Swords	Coins
10. <i>Malkuth</i>	betrayal [12]	residence [24]	affliction [46]	lineage [29]
R	fortification [12–13]	indignation [24]	grace [47]	fortune [29]
9. <i>Yesod</i>	slowdown [62]	success [61]	cult [98]	realization [90]
R	calamity [63]	faith [6 1]	shame [99]	limitation [91]
8. <i>Hod</i>	battlefield [123]	honor [132]	crisis [119]	mystery [125]
R	repent [124]	restoration [134]	opposition [120]	more [126–7]
7. <i>Netzach</i>	conference [138ff]	thoughts [137]	wish [135]	purity [127]
R	indecision [143]	plan [138]	counsel [135–6]	diffidence [129]
6. <i>Tiphereth</i>	domestic [186]	the past [152]	voyage [197]	now [241]
R	awaiting [188]	reproduction [152ff]	declaration [199]	ambition [242]
5. <i>Din</i>	gold [264]	legacy [261]	loss [265]	charity [257]
R	disputes [265]	ancestry [261]	torment [266]	chaos (salutary) [257ff]

4. <i>Chesed</i>	covenant [281]	concern [278]	solitude [272]	gift [274]
R	increase [282]	sign [279]	restriction [272]	delay [274]
3. <i>Binah</i>	effort [295]	outcome [293]	separation [300]	renown [303]
R	troubles end [295]	completion [294]	error [300]	child [304]
2. <i>Chokmah</i>	affliction [333]	love [328]	attachment [330]	obstacle [344]
R	miracles [334]	desire [328–330]	duplicity [331]	letters [345ff]
Ace. <i>Kether</i>	origin [362]	abundance [351]	fury [365]	joy, solar cure [353]
R	fall [363]	transmutation [351]	multiplicity [365]	inestimable [353]

SOURCE OF THE “REVERSED” NUMERALS

No fewer than eighty cartomantic interpretations are parallel to passages in *Gates of Light*. Both meanings of a card, upright and reversed, relate to the *sephirah* whose number corresponds to the number on the card.

In the preceding chart, the bracketed numbers demonstrate the congruence between Etteilla’s terminology for his cards and Gikatilla’s commentary about the *sephiroth*. The bracketed numbers indicate pages in Avi Weinstein’s 1994 translation and commentary.⁵ (Of course, Weinstein does not comment on the Tarot, but he is very helpful in explaining Gikatilla’s text.) Gikatilla treats the *sephiroth* from 10 to 1. Therefore, the lowest page numbers are at the top of my chart, the highest at the bottom. The reader will observe that the structure is orderly; the two meanings for a given card are close neighbors in the text, and the “upright” meaning always comes before the “reversed” meaning. The latter here is labeled “R.” The two meanings are to be found on the cards themselves or in Etteilla’s explanatory texts.

A card’s inversion does not necessarily display a meaning that could be construed as the opposite of the primary term. Furthermore, the “reversed” meanings apparently have no respect for my earlier distinction: benedictions (Cups and Coins) versus afflictions (Bats and Swords). The distinction holds only for the cards when upright. Nevertheless, the two terms on a card are closely related by their mutual derivation from Gikatilla’s commentary on the corresponding *sephirah*.

WHO WAS GIKATILLA (JOSEPH BEN ABRAHAM)?

The name “Gikatilla”—or, in Spanish, *Chiquitilla*—means “very smallest.” Joseph Gikatilla was born in the Castilian town of Medinaceli in 1248 but settled in Segovia. At age twenty-four, he became a student of Abraham Abulafia, a controversial cabalist. Abulafia taught the use of Hebrew letters—analyzed, visualized, vocalized—to induce ecstasy and prophecy. He did not receive great recognition among Castilian cabalists; their focus was shifting from ecstatic experience to philosophical speculation. Gikatilla combined the two schools of thought. In 1274, he wrote *Ginnat Egoz* (*Nut Garden*). The root for *Ginnat*, **GNT**, is a surreptitious reference to *Gematria* (Numerology), *Notarikon* (Acronyms), and *Temurah* (Cryptography), all used in analyzing scripture. In the 1280s, Gikatilla seems to have exchanged ideas with Moses de Leon, who is now recognized as the author of the *Zohar* (*Book of Splendor*). De Leon was already at work on that monumental book. Gikatilla was probably working on his *Sha’are Tzedek* (*Gates of Righteousness*), which examines the *sephiroth* in descending order. Before 1293, Gikatilla wrote his *Gates of Light*, which examines the *sephiroth* in ascending order. This book is one of the first to display a familiarity with the *Zohar*. *Gates of Light* is mystical but practical. It teaches us to direct our prayers to the correct *sephiroth* and to use the correct name of God at each level.⁶ Gikatilla died in Peñafiel after 1325. His books became enduring classics.

The first translation of the *Gates of Light* was a free rendering in Latin by Paolo Riccio (Paulus Ricius) in 1516.⁷ He was born into a Jewish family but, as an adult, converted to Christianity. He became a professor of philosophy at Pavia and later a physician at the court of Emperor Maximilian I. Thus, Christian cabalists had access to the *Gates of Light* (figure 10.2).

FROM GIKATILLA TO ETTEILLA AND BEYOND

Now I can broadly chart the migration of ideas from the pages of the *Gates of Light* to the numeral cards of the cartomantic Tarot.

Neither common cards nor Tarot cards appear in the traditional cabala, but the Tarot's suit-signs happen to look cabalistic. In the cabala, blessings are symbolized by overflowing vessels (cf. Cups) and by treasure (cf. Coins); afflictions are symbolized by weapons (cf. Swords) and by branches (cf. Staves). The references to branches derive from a legend about Adam, who sinned by lopping branches from trees in the Garden of Eden. Symbolic vessels, treasure, weapons, and branches occur abundantly in Gikatilla's *Gates of Light*.

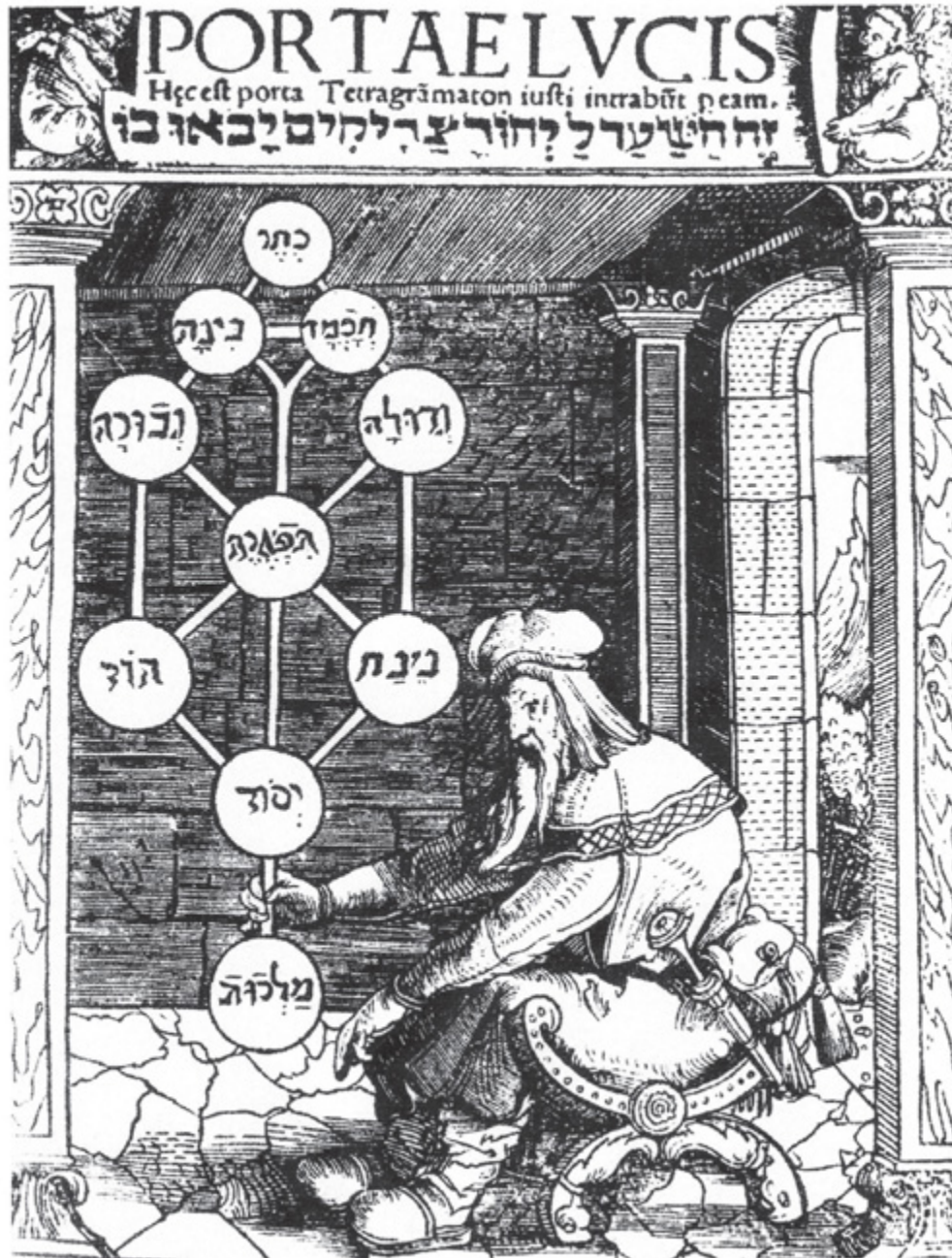


Figure 10.2. Cabalist contemplating the Tree of Life, woodcut (title page from *Portae Lucis*, Augsburg, 1516). [This book is Paulus Ricius's Latin translation of *Sha'are Orah* (*Gates of Light*) by Joseph Gikatilla.]

Unknown students of the cabala in the early 1700s (I would guess) evidently read *Gates of Light* and contrived to recall its *sephiroth*. What language did those students use? A clue may reside in the meaning for Etteilla's Ace of Swords ("extreme, furious"). In discussing the related

sphere of *Kether*, Gikatilla quotes from Deuteronomy 33:27, which can be translated: “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (cf. the RSV Bible). But a more “furious” translation is: “He subdues the ancient gods, shatters the forces of old” (cf. the New RSV Bible). That study of Gikatilla’s *sephiroth* must have involved a student who understood the subtleties of the original Hebrew. The Hebrew source could have been the *Sha’are Orah* published by Zeligman Raiz (Offenbach, 1715).

That student or group of students must have extracted key terms from each chapter in Gikatilla’s book and systematically tabulated them on the numeral cards of an Italian-suited deck (having suits of Batons, Cups, Swords, Coins). Gikatilla’s references to blessings in the *sephiroth* (from Ten to One) were inscribed on numeral cards (from Ten to Ace) in the two “round suits.” Similarly, his references to afflictions came to occupy the two “long suits.” I have devised this summary for the suit cards when dealt upright:

	BLESSINGS	CHALLENGES
SPIRITUAL	Cups	Swords
MATERIAL	Coins	Batons

Those eighteenth-century students of the *Gates of Light* may have used the Tarot’s numeral cards only as a mnemonic tabulation, meant to recall Gikatilla’s teaching. But the cards rather promptly received cartomantic use, I suppose. While the cards occur in the *Tarot de Marseille*, the deck was not then available in Paris. Cartomancers there transferred the meanings of the Tarot’s numeral cards to those of the piquet deck. This required condensing forty numeral cards into twenty. Inscriptions thus occupied both the top and the bottom of each piquet card.

The specialized piquet attracted Etteilla. He interviewed older cartomancers and eventually found meanings for all the numeral cards. He must have acquired a deck (or a detailed description of a deck) that was well informed by Gikatilla’s text. How else could Etteilla have restored that “sublime science” of the Tarot? Furthermore, for the reversed cards,

he learned forty more meanings, all derived from Gikatilla. Perhaps a sudden discovery of a fund of information was the very thing that impelled Etteilla to produce his own cards. He did not necessarily comprehend his debt to *Gates of Light*. He may never have heard of the book. He only incidentally acknowledged a debt to the cabala in general. He quite possibly intended his four suits to correspond to *Yod-Heh-Vau-Heh*, the sacred name of God in Hebrew, but those correspondences were not inspired by Gikatilla.

Etteilla's research apparently did not yield anything cabalistic about figure cards. We recall testimony from the Comte de Mellet who said that "our cartomancers" did not know how to use the "hieroglyphs," referring to the picture cards. Etteilla probably found no impressive source for their symbolism and therefore used his own imagination. He created new court cards, and he revised and invented trumps to express aspects of the cabala: in the Grand Etteilla Tarot, trumps Two through Eight correspond to seven *sephiroth*. They interested Etteilla because they can participate in the seven days of the Creation story, something that de Gébelin had incorrectly proclaimed to be the subject matter of the trumps.

After Etteilla's death, his celebrity and authority declined. Tarotists have more widely followed a later French magus, Éliphas Lévi (1810–1875). He knew Etteilla's work and cited Etteilla's meanings for a couple of numeral cards. Lévi stated that the cards from Ace to Ten relate to the *sephiroth*, from *Kether* to *Malkuth*. However, he never mentioned Gikatilla and never recognized the basis of Etteilla's cartomantic structures (ten *sephiroth* residing at seven levels on the Tree of Life). Neither did Lévi publish any other system for understanding the numeral cards. He preferred to concentrate on the trumps, which he invested with his own cabalistic constructions using the Hebrew alphabet.

Lévi's books inspired a contemporary, Paul Christian (1811–1877), and the much younger Papus (1865–1916). The former wrote *L'Homme Rouge des Tuileries* (*Red Man of the Tuileries*, Paris, 1863), containing Christian's baseless myth about Tarot images on the walls of an Egyptian hall of initiation. He recycled the story in his *Histoire de la Magie* (*History of Magic*, Paris, 1870). Christian sought to coordinate the Tarot's numeral cards with the Egyptian Decans (those zodiacal divisions of ten-degree arcs, each with a presiding *daimon* having specific powers). Papus

wrote *Le Tarot des Bohémiens* (*Tarot of the Gypsies*, Paris, 1889; translated as *The Tarot of the Bohemians*, London, 1896). Papus sought to coordinate the Tarot's numeral cards with the letters of the Tetragrammaton: Yod-Heh-Vau-Heh. This proves implausible because four letters must be forced into conjunction with ten numerals. Furthermore, the formula does not invite very specific interpretations.

Lévi's casual linking of *sephiroth* and numeral cards had already attracted English esoterists, such as Frederick Holland.⁸ Holland was the first cabalist to mentor S. L. Mathers, who became more famous than his teacher. Mathers published *The Tarot: Its Occult Signification, Use in Fortune-Telling, and Method of Play* (London, 1888). This booklet was meant to accompany the *T de M*. Mathers used Lévi's texts to interpret the trumps but Etteilla's texts to interpret the suits.

Also in 1888, Mathers helped in founding the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. In the Order's Tarot lessons, Lévi's ideas about the trumps were crucially revised (while still making cabalistic use of the Hebrew alphabet). In the Order, Etteilla's meanings for the numeral cards were greatly diluted. Now the Jewish *sephiroth* were merged with the Egyptian Decans (probably prompted by Paul Christian's books but reworked with a respect for the Decans as delineated in the medieval *Picatrix*).⁹ No version of the Decans can be convincingly applied to the numeral cards: we have thirty-six Decans (in a continuous cycle of personifications having equal powers) but forty numeral cards (in four separate suits of faceless suit-signs having obvious hierarchies). Besides, the Decans have their own pictorial traditions—none of them resembling the Tarot's suit cards. Mathers doubtless depended on Holland for another set of correspondences that became part of the Golden Dawn's doctrine. Holland populated thirty-six of the numeral cards with the seventy-two angels of the *Shem ha-Mephorash*.¹⁰ Again, the combination is not very feasible because of different quantities and different qualities (not to mention the incongruous fusion of Egyptian demons with Jewish angels). Besides, Tarotists already had suspected that the *sephiroth* could explain the numeral cards. Why was this explanation subordinated to less convincing systems? Golden Dawn members regarded their doctrine as a magnificent synthesis of magical theories and practices. I regard it as a hopeless

farrago. One of the Order's members was Aleister Crowley, who was so enthusiastic about the Golden Dawn's secret doctrine that he wanted to reveal it to the world. He planned to ignore his vows of secrecy and find a publisher. This probably motivated A. E. Waite to begin work on a Tarot for the general public.

At that very time, Papus published *Le Tarot Divinatoire* (*The Divinatory Tarot*, Paris, 1909). In this, Papus tacitly abandoned his youthful fantasies of 1889 and revived more traditional cartomancy. For the trumps, Papus now depended primarily on Paul Christian for the imagery and on Éliphas Lévi for the cabalistic correspondences. For the suits, Papus now depended primarily on Etteilla.

Waite enlisted the artistic talents of Pamela Colman Smith in illustrating the meanings of all seventy-eight cards. Waite describes them in his books, *The Key to the Tarot* (London, 1910) and *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (London, 1911). Many of the numeral cards maintain direct connections to Etteilla's cartomancy. Waite encountered it through multiple channels: fragmentarily, through the instruction that he received as a member of the Golden Dawn, and comprehensively, through his own research into the entire cartomantic tradition. Oddly, he professed to despise cartomancy, although he encouraged it through several books. In an annotated bibliography in his *Pictorial Key*, Waite cited Papus's 1909 survey and insulted its author, its illustrator, and its readership—even though Waite's deck is comparable to Papus's deck in relying on Christian and Etteilla. Waite at the same time blatantly promoted *The Tarot of the Bohemians*, Papus's incoherent book of 1889. Waite was not quite objective about it. He had been hired to reissue it. However, years later, he dismissed that book and all French Tarotism as a "tissue of errors."¹¹

Waite tacitly accepted the cabalism and the paganism that the Golden Dawn professed to find in the Tarot, but he also had a Christian agenda. In his *Hidden Church of the Holy Grail* (1909), he suggested that the Tarot's suit-signs descended from the four "hallows," purportedly enshrined in the Grail Castle of Arthurian legend. The hallows normally are the Grail, the paten, the lance, the sword. Only two of those relics have obvious equivalents in the Tarot's suit-signs. Waite pretended that the paten (dish) became the Tarot's Coin, while the lance (spear) became the Tarot's Wand.

Waite's theory convinced an uncritical Jessie Weston, who incorporated it in her book, *From Ritual to Romance* (1920). In Waite's last esoteric book, *The Holy Grail* (1933), he maintained his theory of Tarot hallows, and he chided Weston for not crediting him as its originator.¹² Waite lived until 1942, but he probably never knew the 1939 report about the Mameluke deck in the Topkapi Museum.¹³ Europe's first suit-signs must have been provided by Muslim traders, not a hidden church.

Aleister Crowley issued a deck, the "Thoth Tarot," with its own novelties. But Crowley still basically depended on the Golden Dawn's teachings: correspondences for the Hebrew letters underlay his trump designs, and the Egyptian Decans were among the bases for his numeral cards. Crowley further coordinated the numeral cards with the Chinese *I Ching*.

I personally mistrust the artificial merging of separate symbolic systems, separate because they never previously met in any known culture or tradition. Individuals of course can force a merger. But the symbols become distorted, to their mutual detriment. I recommend that Tarotists distinguish between their deck's Hermetic components and its cabalistic components. We can appreciate both traditions while preserving their integrity.

No drastic syncretism is needed to improve on the Tree of Life as the foundation for the numeral cards. Rather than extending the *sephiroth* to connect with Egyptian Decans or God's seventy-two names or Chinese cosmographs or Christian Grail legends, Tarotists would do better to deepen their interpretations of those cards by delving into reliable commentaries about the Tree.

Part Five



The Text Applied to the Numerals

Numeral Cards and Gikatilla's “Gates”



MINOR CARDS NOT MINOR

Now, despite the utilitarian plainness of the numeral cards in the *Tarot de Marseille*, I have a comprehensive system by which I can invest them with meaning. By my theory, those “minor” cards were not really minor: they became detached from their profound source, the Tree of Life as Joseph Gikatilla analyzed it in his *Gates of Light*. Etteilla, the first professional cartomancer of note, was not aware of his debt to Gikatilla; or, if aware of it, Etteilla kept the debt secret. (I note that Etteilla's Two of Cups includes a rock and two snakes, motifs that could have been chosen for their esoteric symbolism in *Gates of Light*.¹ But Etteilla could have inherited symbols without his having comprehended their greater source.) Etteilla alluded only vaguely to his dependence on the cabala. He acknowledged his reliance on older cartomancers. They themselves probably knew little or nothing of Gikatilla. Nevertheless, they relayed the key terminology for each card, and they were surprisingly reliable. Of course, their focus was on practical fortunetelling and not an abstruse doctrine. The cards' key terms were skewed toward discussions of the everyday concerns of clients. We can reexamine the cartomantic system and retrieve something of Gikatilla's wisdom. Here we arrive at greatly refined ideas behind

Etteilla's simple lexicon. In this cabalistic context, his vocabulary frequently acquires unexpected shades of meaning.

FORM OF TABULATION

In this chapter, information is encoded as follows:

- Etteilla's deck has greatly influenced many Tarotists, but especially Claude Hugand² and A. E. Waite.³ Entries in *italics* indicate agreement between Hugand and Etteilla. Entries in CAPITALS indicate agreement between Waite and Etteilla. Entries *BOTH* italicized and capitalized indicate unanimity among Waite, Hugand, and Etteilla.
- **Bold** typeface will alert the reader to those points where the texts of Gikatilla and of Etteilla coincide. Some of Etteilla's terms recall Gikatilla's quotations of scripture (for each of them, I cite chapter and verse).
- *Gates of Light* was translated from Hebrew to English by Avi Weinstein in 1994. When I cite Gikatilla's text, I also cite Weinstein, thus: "AW" followed by the relevant page number(s).

MEANINGS, CARD BY CARD

For individual numeral cards, I follow the ten *sephiroth*. Gikatilla begins with *Malkuth*, the lowest *sephirah*, and continues sequentially to *Kether*. We will trace the sequence four times, one for each suit in the Tarot.

Wands

10 WANDS: material challenge in *Malkuth*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *treason, PERFIDY, DISGUISE, prevarication, duplicity, falsity*

On *Malkuth*: Gikatilla says that the space between heaven and earth is entirely filled with spirits of various sorts. Some are **unfaithful** and seek to harm the faithful. God is our protector. “You need not fear the terror by night or the arrow that flies by day, the plague that stalks in the darkness...” (Psalm 91:5–6) [AW 12].

Reversed: *obstacle, barrier, CONTRARITIES, DIFFICULTIES* (Etteilla adds “redoubt, hedge, **fortification.**”)

On *Malkuth*: Gikatilla says that David composed the Book of Psalms (*Zemiroth*) in order to disperse opposing forces. And he wrote that God’s laws were his **fortitude** (*zemiroth*). To this effect, Gikatilla quotes Psalm 119:54 [AW 12-13].

9 WANDS: material challenge in *Yesod*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *DELAY, SUSPENSION, slowdown*

On *Yesod*: Gikatilla says that when humanity neglects the law, Righteousness flees; the channels of the Tree of Life become cramped, and God’s goodness descends only partially or **slowly**. “The righteous man perishes” (Isaiah 57:1) [AW 62].

Reversed: *OBSTACLE, opposition, disadvantage, ADVERSITY, CALAMITY*

On *Yesod*: Gikatilla says that the evil man destroys the world and ruins the order of Creation. “A querulous man is **separated** from the master” (Proverbs 16:28) [AW 63].

8 WANDS: material challenge in *Hod*, at the Place of Counsel

Upright: *countryside, rejoicing, PEACE* (Etteilla also gives “**battlefield.**”)

On *Hod*: “My Majesty (*Vihodi*) became a destroyer, and no strength within me remained” (Daniel 10:8). For this is the place where **wars** are won and where prayers of thanksgiving (*Hodaot*) are given [AW 123].

Reversed: *domestic DISPUTE, irresolution, uncertainty, doubt* (Etteilla adds “to **repent**.”)

On *Hod*: Gikatilla reminds us that *Netzach* and *Hod* relate to the knees. (The Tree of Life can be compared to a human figure.) This is the level of prayer: we must **repent**, sink to our knees, and receive a benedictory prayer (called *Modim*, a name related to the root *Hod*) [AW 124].

7 WANDS: material challenge in *Netzach*, at the Place of Counsel

Upright: **CONFERENCE**, *discourse, talk, NEGOTIATION* (Etteilla adds “chatter, babble.”)

On *Netzach*: Gikatilla names the level of *Netzach* and *Hod* as the “Place of Counsel,” counseling the entire earth. Good counsel ultimately comes from God. Gikatilla says, “For the Lord of Hosts has **conferred**; and who will retract it?” (Isaiah 14:27) [AW 138–41].

Reversed: **INDECISION**, *irresolution, uncertainty*, PERPLEXITY

On *Netzach*: Gikatilla suggests that Adam and all his descendants have been **indecisive**, but God is constant. “Moreover the victory (*netzach*) of Israel does not deceive His [God’s] mind, for He is not Adam” (I Samuel 15:29) [AW 143].

6 WANDS: material challenge in *Tiphereth*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: **SERVANT**, *subordinate, home interior*

On *Tiphereth*: Gikatilla discusses the future when the Gentiles will be the willing **servants** of Israel. “Kings shall tend your children and queens will be your nurses. They shall bow to you, face to the ground, and lick the dust of your feet” (Isaiah 49:23) [AW 186–7].

Reversed: **AWAITING**, *HOPE, fear*

On *Tiphereth*: Israel must be patient. “Our eyes are toward Yahweh our God, **awaiting** His favor” (Psalm 123:2) [AW 188].

5 WANDS: material challenge in *Din*, at the Heavenly Court

Upright: **GOLD**, RICHES, *abundance*, FORTUNE

On *Din*: The fifth *sephirah* is called “Gold.” The heavenly Law Court decides whether the petitioner deserves his request. If so, fortune and favor are brought forth from the “north” (the word in Hebrew is cognate with “hidden”), since that is the Court’s hiding place for delights, rarities, and **gold**. Gikatilla quotes Job 37:22, “By the north wind, the **golden** rays emerge” [AW 264]. If we are required to view all Wands as challenging, the gold here may become a heavy responsibility or a source of contention.

Reversed: LITIGATION, *quarrel*, *contest*, **DISPUTES**

On *Din*: This is the level of the Great Sanhedrin (Heavenly Court). Here, according to Gikatilla, informants and prosecutors can **dispute** with any creatures [AW 265].

4 WANDS: material challenge in *Chesed*, at the Heavenly Court

Upright: *society*, *crew*, *band*, *company*, **COVENANT**

On *Chesed*: Gikatilla discourses on the community of the faithful, with whom God has three **covenants**: through Abraham (Mercy), through Isaac (Fear), through Jacob (Truth). Gikatilla cites Leviticus 26:42 [AW 281]. This covenant designates God’s chosen people. It is a spiritual kindness but a material challenge.

Reversed: PROSPERITY, **INCREASE**, *thriving*, *FELICITY*, BEAUTY, EMBELLISHMENT

On *Chesed*: Gikatilla quotes Exodus (32:13), “Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore. And speak to them, saying, ‘I will **increase** your seed’” [AW 282].

3 WANDS: material challenge in *Binah*, on the Path of Love

Upright: ENTERPRISE, **EFFORT**

On *Binah*: **Efforts** to unite *Binah* and *Malkuth* repair the tree-cutting perpetrated by Adam. Abraham is the great restorer. “And he planted a tamarisk in Beersheba” (Genesis 21:33). And he repaired the sphere of

Malkuth, which was empty, and he brought abundance to it through the sphere of *Binah* [AW 295].

Reversed: **END OF TROUBLES**, *end of suffering*

On *Binah*: Adam's sin caused the departure of the *Shekinah* (God's presence, envisioned as feminine). When Solomon built the temple, she considered it an acceptable dwelling. "This is my **resting place forever**" (Psalm 132:14) [AW 295].

2 WANDS: material challenge in *Chokmah*, on the Path of Love

Upright: *CHAGRIN, SADNESS, melancholy, affliction, desolation*

On *Chokmah*: Gikatilla quotes Hannah as she cries to God, "See the **destitution** of your maidservant" (I Samuel 1:11). One who has attained this level will be able to direct his or her prayers to the highest *sephirah* [AW 333].

Reversed: *SURPRISE, ENCHANTMENT, TROUBLE, FEAR, consternation, astonishment, miracle*

On *Chokmah*: All the prophets and sages worked their **miracles** by calling on this *sephirah* [AW 334].

ACE OF WANDS: material challenge in *Kether*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *BIRTH, BEGINNING, ORIGIN, SOURCE*

On *Kether*: "And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east" (Genesis 2:8). "In the east" (*kedem*) has an alternative meaning, "of old." This associates esoterically with *Kether* as the **origin** of everything [AW 362].

Reversed: *downfall, DECADENCE, decline, lessening, RUIN, to FALL*

On *Kether*: Gikatilla conflates an event in the Book of Daniel 3:3–4 with a prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah 51:44. In the resulting story, the Babylonians had defeated the Jews, and furnishings from the Jerusalem Temple were offered for consumption by the idol of Bel, a

Babylonian god. Daniel caused the idol to disgorge the offerings and to **fall** [AW 363].



Cups

10 CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Malkuth*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *TOWN, COUNTRY* [homeland], **residence**

On *Malkuth*: This *sephirah* associates with the *Shekinah*, which Gikatilla defines as “dweller,” referring to the spirit of God that dwells among the righteous and blesses them as a community. Gikatilla quotes Exodus (25:8), “And let them make me a sanctuary that I may **reside** among them” [AW 24]. At first, this dwelling was in the lower spheres of the Tree of Life. The *Shekinah* later recoiled from human evil and moved closer to God. (Still later, the *Shekinah* deigned to dwell in the Tabernacle and in the Jerusalem Temple. When the temple was destroyed, the *Shekinah* accompanied the faithful.)

Reversed: *anger, INDIGNATION, VIOLENCE*

On *Malkuth*: The *Shekinah* is happy to dwell on earth when God’s people are upright. But when they sin, She withdraws in her **alienation**. The channels of the Tree of Life become damaged, and blessings cannot flow down to us [AW 24].

9 CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Yesod*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: **VICTORY, SUCCESS**, achievement, *ADVANTAGE*

On *Yesod*: “Righteousness **saves** from death” (Proverbs 10:2). Gikatilla further mentions escape from life-threatening attacks, injuries, illnesses, etc. [AW 61]. In French cartomancy, the equivalent card (Nine of Hearts) is the “wish card,” the most positive.

Reversed: *sincerity*, TRUTH, LOYALTY, *frankness*, *ingenuousness*, *simplicity*, LIBERTY (Etteilla also gives “**good faith.**”)

On *Yesod*: “Your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be **righteous**, they shall possess the land for ever” (Isaiah 60:20–21) [AW 61].

8 CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Hod*, at the Place of Counsel

Upright: *Blonde girl*, **HONOR**, MODESTY, TIMIDITY

On *Hod*: *Hod* can be translated as “**Honor.**” Gikatilla refers us to the story of Hagar (Genesis 16). She was shunned and lost, destitute, in the wilderness. Even so, she was visited by an angel and favored with a prophecy. *Netzach* and *Hod* are the principal *sephiroth* of prophecy [AW 132].

Reversed: SATISFACTION, HAPPINESS, *contentment*, *gaiety*, JOY (Etteilla also gives “**restoration.**”)

On *Hod*: From the level of *Netzach* and *Hod* comes a **regenerative** power. It sustains all the hosts of heaven and earth. The “book of man’s descendants” relies on this place. Its force also nourishes all trees, plants, and animals [AW 134].

7 CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Netzach*, at the Place of Counsel

Upright: **thought**, *idea*, IMAGINATION, *view*, *opinion*, SENTIMENT

On *Netzach*: Our thoughts should be directed to the *sephiroth*, so as to cleanse them. As our prayers ascend the Tree of Life, our thoughts are going deeper, just as a physical ascent can go deep into space (Gikatilla actually gives this example, although it sounds very modern). “From the depths I have called You, O Lord” (Psalm 130:1). “How deep are Your **thoughts**” (Psalm 92:5) [AW 137].

Reversed: **PLAN**, *design*, *intention*, WILL, DETERMINATION

On *Netzach*: Gikatilla refers to Psalm 20:5, which says of Adonai, “He will fulfill your every **plan**” [AW 138].

6 CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Tiphereth*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *PAST*, previously, *antiquity*, ***preceding***

On *Tiphereth*: Aspects of *Chesed* and *Din* meet in *Tiphereth*. Mercy and Truth will **precede** God's face. Gikatilla notes that the word *yikadmu* ("will precede") has the same root as *kedem* ("of old"). He quotes the Book of Lamentations 5:21, "Renew our days of old," and Micah 7:20, "As You have sworn to our fathers in days of old" [AW 152].

Reversed: *FUTURE*, *subsequently*, *postponement* (Etteilla also gives "regeneration, **reproduction**, renewal.")

On *Tiphereth*: Gikatilla refers to Genesis 15:2 in which Abraham worries that he has no children. He hears the Lord's promise of many **descendants** [AW 152–4].

5 CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Din*, at the Heavenly Court

Upright: *INHERITANCE*, *succession*, ***LEGACY***, GIFT, PATRIMONY, TRANSMISSION

On *Din*: God transmitted the Ten Commandments and other **legacies** through Moses [AW 260].

Reversed: *relative*, *CONSANGUINITY*, ***ANCESTRY***, ALLIANCE, AFFINITY

On *Din*: Gikatilla quotes Joshua 24:2 as saying, "Across the river your **forefathers** dwelled" [AW 261]. [Possible interpretation: the three highest *sephiroth* are the sources (ancestors) of all the others.] Gikatilla explains the patriarch as a judge: Yahweh is the source of Power (*Gevurah*), another name for the fifth *sephirah*. This is the power of the Heavenly Court.

4 CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Chesed*, at the Heavenly Court

Upright: *boredom* (Etteilla also gives "**concern.**")

On *Chesed*: Abraham lacked the benefit of a mentor to give him **warning**. He gives warning to his people so that they can avoid harsh judgment from the Heavenly Court [AW 278].

Reversed: *NEW INSTRUCTION*, *LIGHT*, **sign** (Etteilla also gives “prognostication.”)

On *Chesed*: Gikatilla says that Jacob (the personification of Truth) received Yahweh’s **seal** (insignia, sign). By this sign, Yahweh created the world and sustains its creatures and will judge his children [AW 279].

3 CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Binah*, on the Path of Love

Upright: *OUTCOME*, *success*, *happy ending*, *VICTORY*, *PERFECTION* (Etteilla adds **accomplishment**.)

On *Binah*: Gikatilla says that the unity of *Binah* and the lower spheres can be **achieved** by fulfillment of the Commandments. Then the blessings of *Binah* descend, with the **outcome** of tranquility and security for all people [AW 293].

Reversed: *EXPEDITION*, *DISPATCH*, **completion**, *conclusion*, *END*

On *Binah*: Gikatilla quotes Leviticus 25:24 on stewardship of the land, which the cabalists interpret as the Tree of Life from *Binah* to *Malkuth*. Gikatilla describes the unity of *Binah* with the lower *sephiroth*. When the world is in **complete** repair, all the channels are in full flow, and blessings go forth [AW 294].

2 CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Chokmah*, on the Path of Love

Upright: **LOVE**, *PASSION*, *SYMPATHY*, *FRIENDSHIP*, *AFFINITY*

On *Chokmah*: Gikatilla quotes Proverbs 8:21 as a promise of blessings for those who **love** God [AW 328].

Reversed: **desire**, *wish*, *PASSION*

On *Chokmah*: Gikatilla adduces two enigmatic quotations: “The way of the snake is to climb over the rock” (Proverbs 30:19) and “God was

drawn forward to love them” (Deuteronomy 10:15). *Gates of Light* refers to two evil snakes, Akalton, who is the Serpent in Eden, and Amalek, who is the embodiment of evil. (The name Amalek occurs in Genesis 36:12, Exodus 17:8–16, I Samuel 15:1–34, and I Chronicles 1:36.) Amalek, cited here, desires to wield power and fear. He seeks to control “the Rock” (*Tzur*), here meaning the fifth *sephirah*, Power and Fear. God’s **desires** are stronger [AW 328–30].

ACE OF CUPS: spiritual blessing in *Kether*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *TABLE*, NOURISHMENT, **ABUNDANCE**, **prayer**, altar

On *Kether*: *Kether* communicates the power of **prayer** and **fulfillment** “like the raising of the high priest’s hands in blessing, and the essence of the incense offerings” [AW 351].

Reversed: *MUTATION*, *exchange*, **TRANSMUTATION**

On *Kether*: *Kether*, on the middle pillar of the Tree of Life, mediates between Severity and Mercy. God gives us the ability to **transform** judgment into loving-kindness. Four times in one paragraph here, Gikatilla mentions transformation [AW 351].



Swords

10 SWORDS: spiritual challenge in *Malkuth*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *weeping*, *TEARS*, **AFFLICTION**, *chagrin*, SADNESS, PAIN, DESOLATION

On *Malkuth*: Gikatilla gives a long discussion of *Zot* (“This”). In scripture, not surprisingly, the word is common, but the cabalists endow it with uncommon meanings, such as the blessedness of Israel. “*Zot* is my comfort in my **affliction**” (Psalm 119:50) [AW 46].

Reversed: *ADVANTAGE, PROFIT, SUCCESS, FAVOR, AUTHORITY*
(Etteilla adds **grace**.)

On *Malkuth*: Gikatilla cites Deuteronomy 32:29 as a commandment to think about *Zot* (the special status of God's chosen people). They would find **grace** and be enlightened [AW 47].

9 SWORDS: spiritual challenge in *Yesod*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *PRIEST, hermit, cult*

On *Yesod*: Esau was relegated to Seir, the land of the goat **demons**. The people no longer will offer sacrifices to the demons, but Esau will live in disgrace [AW 98]. In French cartomancy, the equivalent card (Nine of Spades) is the most unfortunate card.

Reversed: justifiable distrust, *GOOD GROUNDS FOR SUSPICION, REASONABLE FEAR, DOUBT, SHAME*

On *Yesod*: Edom (the land of Esau) will be the least among nations. "You shall be the most **despised**" (Obadiah 1:2). Edom's guardian angel will be the Angel of Death, Samael ("Poison of God"). "For my sword will be seen in the sky" (Isaiah 34:5), meaning that Samael will incur God's wrath [AW 99].

8 SWORDS: spiritual challenge in *Hod*, at the Place of Counsel

Upright: **CRISIS**, *unfortunate juncture, delicate circumstance, CENSURE, criticism*

On *Hod*: Gikatilla discusses *Hod* along with *Netzach*, on the same level. These two, says Gikatilla, foment all the wars in the world. **Jealousy** dwells at this level. He says obscurely, "This is the **endpoint** of the spheres" [AW 119].

Reversed: *incident, DIFFICULTY, event, OPPOSITION, unforeseen, FATALITY, ACCIDENT*

On *Hod*: Gikatilla notes that *Hod* is vertically aligned with the *sephirah* of Judgment (or Severity or Fear). He then lists fearsome

weapons. They are **opposed** by a counter-offensive of swords (Song of Songs 3:8) [AW 120].

7 **WORDS:** spiritual challenge in *Netzach*, at the Place of Counsel

Upright: *HOPE*, **WISH**, *desire*, TASTE (Etteilla adds “scheme.”)

On *Netzach*: Hannah wanted a son and prayed so intently that her **wish** rose all the way to *Kether*, which contains the mysterious *Mazel* (Luck). Such intensity is required for the granting of any serious wish, such as progeny, long life, or sustenance [AW 135].

Reversed: *wise ADVICE*, *good COUNSEL*, INSTRUCTION, *salutary warnings*

On *Netzach*: This is the Path of **Counsel**, which draws on higher levels, namely *Mazel* (Luck) and the Great Court. Gikatilla says that God refers to the Court as the agent who will “add to your days” (Isaiah 38:5) [AW 135–6].

6 **WORDS:** spiritual challenge in *Tiphereth*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *ROUTE*, *WAY*, *ENVOY* (Etteilla also gives “**voyage**.” Waite says “journey by **water**.”)

On *Tiphereth*: Two relevant terms, *Mayim Elyonim* (“the upper waters”) and *Eliyoth* or *Aliyoth* (“His lofts”), allude to **voyaging**. “He sets the rafters of His lofts in the **waters**” (Psalm 104:3) [AW 197].

Reversed: **DECLARATION**, *revelation*, *manifesto*, *making public*, *making known*, **CONFESSION**

On *Tiphereth*: *Tiphereth* unites the two higher *sephiroth*, Mercy and Fear. When the soul is judged, Jacob (Truth) will stand between Abraham (Mercy) and Isaac (Fear). Then the proper **declaration** will be made [AW 199].

5 **WORDS:** spiritual challenge in *Din*, at the Heavenly Court

Upright: **LOSS**, DEGRADATION, DESTRUCTION, *disadvantage*, *shame*, DISHONOR, INFAMY

On *Din*: Gikatilla discusses loss as **sacrifice**, atoning for our sins. “We will sacrifice to Yahweh our God lest we be harmed by pestilence or the sword” (Exodus 5:3) [AW 265–6].

Reversed: *grief*, *chagrin*, **torment**, OBSEQUIES, BURIAL

On *Din*: This is the sphere of Judgment. One of its judges is the ancient Serpent, here called Akalton. It was he who killed Adam, defiled Eve, and dealt so much **torment** at the time of the Great Flood [AW 266].

4 **WORDS**: spiritual challenge in *Chesed*, at the Heavenly Court

Upright: **SOLITUDE**, *desert*, RETREAT, EXILE

On *Chesed*: The world needs at least one righteous person whose prayers will save it. **Solitary** saints and sages have served this role, as did the patriarch Abraham [AW 272].

Reversed: *ECONOMY*, *WISE ADMINISTRATION*, *arrangement*, *order*, PRECAUTION (Etteilla also gives “avarice, **restriction**.”)

On *Chesed*: Abraham accepted many afflictions and **restrictions** in his life so that he would be worthy of God’s mercy, the highest attribute of this *sephirah* [AW 272].

3 **WORDS**: spiritual challenge in *Binah*, on the Path of Love

Upright: ABSENCE, REMOVAL, DISPERSION, DELAY, *separation*, **DIVISION**, RUPTURE

On *Binah*: This is the place of the spiritual self, which can be **divided** into the higher soul, the spirit, and the lower soul. Their **separation** is the ultimate form of alienation. Gikatilla cites Genesis 17:14 concerning the soul’s being “cut off” from the faithful [AW 300].

Reversed: *CONFUSION*, ALIENATION, DISTRACTION, **ERROR**, LOSS (Etteilla adds “**meandering**.”)

On *Binah*: Gikatilla warns that if the soul fails to heal its spiritual ruptures and persists in its **errors**, it will **wander** from one punishment to another [AW 301].

2 SWORDS: spiritual challenge in *Chokmah*, on the Path of Love

Upright: *FRIENDSHIP, AFFECTION, TENDERNESS, sympathy, INTIMACY* (Etteilla adds “**attachment.**”)

On *Chokmah*: The Book of Job 28:12 asks, “But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?” Gikatilla quotes the reply, “Elohim knows” (Job 28:23). Wisdom and Understanding are profound, because, as *sephiroth*, they are **attached** to each other and to the highest sphere, *Kether*, which is completely transcendent [AW 330].

Reversed: *FALSEHOOD, IMPOSTURE, DUPLICITY*

On *Chokmah*: Gikatilla worries that Israel will sin and sever *Chokmah* from the lower spheres. He says, “A **perverse** man spreads strife” (Proverbs 16:28) [AW 331].

ACE OF SWORDS: spiritual challenge in *Kether*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *extreme, EXCESSIVE, fury*

On *Kether*: At the supreme level of *Kether*, we scarcely find any negativity, but the Sword suit indicates some sort of spiritual challenge. Gikatilla quotes from Deuteronomy 33:27, which tells of a militant God who will protect his people: “The God of old is a refuge, a support are the arms everlasting” [AW 365]. But an alternative translation is: “He subdues the ancient gods, shatters the **forces** of old” (cf. p.235).

Reversed: *CONCEPTION, pregnancy, CHILDBIRTH* (Etteilla adds “**multiplicity.**”)

On *Kether*: Gikatilla says that *Kether* should be addressed with a prayer that says, “God will give you the heavenly **multitudes** with the earthly ones” [AW 365].



Coins

10 COINS: material blessing in *Malkuth*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: **HOUSE**, *domicile*, FAMILY, EXTRACTION (family origins)

On *Malkuth*: God never deserts his people. “Lo, I revealed Myself to your father’s **house** in Egypt when they were subject to the house of Pharaoh (I Samuel 2:27) [AW 29].

Reversed: *lottery*, **fortune**, OCCASION

On *Malkuth*: God never deserts his people. “The Lord your God will restore your **fortunes** and return to you in love” (Deuteronomy 30:3) [AW 29].

9 COINS: material blessing in *Yesod*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: **positive**, *effect*, ACCOMPLISHMENT, SUCCESS

On *Yesod*: *Adonai* is an aspect of God that underlies *Yesod*. This aspect, when nourished from above, renders the world **full** and joyful, endowed with celebrations and delicacies [AW 61 or 90].

Reversed: VAIN HOPES, **VOIDED PROJECT**

On *Yesod*: *El Chay* is an aspect of God that overlies *Yesod*. The withdrawal of this aspect would render *Adonai* drained, **empty** [AW 61 or 91].

8 COINS: material blessing in *Hod*, at the Place of Counsel

Upright: *DARK GIRL*, passive (Etteilla adds “*Grand Nuit*,” i.e., Profound Night, but better translated as “**Mystery** of Mysteries.”)

On *Hod*: *Hod* and *Netzach* are the bases of the Tree’s complementary pillars, one on the left and one on the right. They are also two legs that support six higher *sephiroth*. These six together create the Seraphim,

called “Masters of Six Wings.” The pillars are like *shesh* (“marble,” but also the word for “six”) (cf. Song of Songs 5:15) [AW 125–6]. The Seraphim guard the **mystery** of the *Chashmal* (which the King James Bible translates as “amber,” but “electrum” is used elsewhere; modern Hebrew uses *chashmal* to mean “electricity”). The ancient references are to the radiance of the mystical chariot revealed to Ezekiel.

Reversed: Etteilla’s card says only *plus* (**more**). Hugand lists “*plus-que* (more than)” and “*avec usure* (with wear).” *Usure* can also mean “usury,” which is how d’Oudoucet, Waite, and others understood this card. Neither “wear” nor “usury” seems fitting in this context.

On *Hod*: Through *Hod* and *Netzach*, God confers favors, miracles, and wonders. Rewards descend to Israel when God is **aggrandized** by prayers properly addressed [AW 127].

7 COINS: material blessing in *Netzach*, at the Place of Counsel

Upright: *MONEY*, *sum*, *SILVER*, **PURITY**, INNOCENCE

On *Netzach*: “Pour down, O skies, from above” (Isaiah 45:8). When the three supernal *sephiroth* overflow with their treasure, it favors the spheres of *Netzach* and *Hod*. They become **pure** like the very skies (see Exodus 24:10) [AW 127–8]. The seventh *sephirah* receives its power through the fourth, which is called “**silver**.”

Reversed: *disquiet*, *torment*, IMPATIENCE, *care*, APPREHENSION, SUSPICION (Etteilla adds “solicitude” and “**diffidence**.”)

On *Netzach*: Gikatilla says that a particular level of the heavens, *Shamayim*, is located at the level of *Netzach* and *Hod*. From these heavens, the life force enters into human beings and gives them energy and endurance (*netzach*). The spine is a conduit to the brain, heart, liver, and prostate. The backbone receives God’s joys and punishments according to our conduct. Our skeletons are made flexible so that we can bend in **diffidence** to God [AW 129].

6 COINS: material blessing in *Tiphereth*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *THE PRESENT, at this time, NOW, VIGILANCE*

On *Tiphereth*: “See **now** that I, even I, am He; and there is no God before Me” (Deuteronomy 32:39). Gikatilla urges us to examine God’s exact pronouncements in the Torah. The word “now” in conjunction with “I” (God speaking in the first person) indicates that His statement has the force of a commandment [AW 241].

Reversed: *AMBITION, DESIRE, CUPIDITY, JEALOUSY*

On *Tiphereth*: “There [in a place where you will worship pagan gods] you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him, if you search after Him with all your **heart** and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 4:29) [AW 242].

5 COINS: material blessing in *Din*, at the Heavenly Court

Upright: *LOVE* [Charity]

On *Din*: Gikatilla quotes from Psalm 101:1, “**Compassion** and judgment I will sing” [AW 257]. *Din* means “Judgment.”

Reversed: *DISORDER, CHAOS, RUIN*

On *Din*: Gikatilla gives a long discussion of “other gods.” He insists that they exist. Yahweh first installed them as “ministers” over the gentile nations when they sought to build the Tower of Babel to reach to heaven [AW 257–61]. God threw their plan into **chaos** by causing them to speak different languages. This disorder was actually a blessing because it canceled a bad plan.

4 COINS: material blessing in *Chesed*, at the Heavenly Court

Upright: *GIFT, benefit, gratuity*

On *Chesed*: The **gift** of *El* (God) is salvation [AW 274].

Reversed: *suspension, delay, OPPOSITION*

On *Chesed*: *El*, which is God in the form of Absolute Mercy, says, “Do not punish [the sinner] immediately. Wait for him; maybe he will

return to Us.” Time will be extended; fury will be **delayed** [AW 274]. This is a fortunate delay.

3 COINS: material blessing in *Binah*, on the Path of Love

Upright: *NOBLE, of consequence, CELEBRITY, RENOWN, famous, illustrious, greatness*

On *Binah*: Gikatilla says that *Binah* is the Upper *Shekinah* while *Malkuth* is the Lower *Shekinah*. They cooperate to raise a child of special **merit** [AW 303]. This sphere is sometimes called “Mother.” For the importance of the child, see below.

Reversed: PUERILITY, **child**, *smallness*, WEAKNESS

On *Binah*: “The neighbors (*shekinainoth*) gave him a name, saying, ‘A son was born to Naomi’” (Ruth 4:17). *Shekinainoth* has the same consonants as does *Shekinoth*, the plural of *Shekinah*. So we can read, “The *Shekinoth* (*Binah* and *Malkuth*) gave him a name” [AW 304]. The **child** was Obed. He became the father of Jesse, who became the father of David. Small beginnings, cherished by the community (*Shekinah*), can produce greatness.

2 COINS: material blessing in *Chokmah*, on the Path of Love

Upright: *EMBARRASSMENT, OBSTACLE, EMBROILMENT* (Etteilla also gives “emotion.”)

On *Chokmah*: Within a few pages, Gikatilla quotes the same passage three times: “Elohim has come only in order to **test** you” (Exodus 20:20) [AW 344]. *Chokmah* lies on the Path of Love, so the obstacle here is one that ultimately will be beneficial, perhaps productive of wisdom (*chokmah*).

Reversed: *note, writing, LETTER*

On *Chokmah*: Gikatilla closes his chapter on *Chokmah* with meditations on several Hebrew **letters**, especially those in the Tetragrammaton: *YHVH* [AW 345ff].

ACE OF COINS: material blessing in *Kether*, on the Middle Pillar

Upright: *PERFECT CONTENTMENT*, *satisfaction*, **joy**, ECSTASY

On *Kether*: When evil disappears, God's names are restored, and blessings flow. "All heavenly and earthly creatures are filled with **rejoicing**" [AW 353].

Reversed: *purse of money*, *sum*, RICHES, **inestimable**

On *Kether*: The Prophets knew how to use prayer to open the Gates of Mercy. The spheres overflowed with mercy and light having **no end or measure** [AW 353].

Part Six



Compendium of Card Meanings

Synopses and Summary



HERMETIC SUIT-SIGNS

Other researchers have deduced that the 4-suit deck of cards originated in Asia approximately a thousand years ago. I would specify the birthplace as Harran, in southeastern Turkey. Its population of Sabians, a Hermetic sect, must have been predisposed to use astrological suit-signs (a tradition that continues, largely unrecognized, among the card players of India). The Sabian origin would account for the suit-signs in the Tarot. By my interpretation, we have the Moon's Sticks (originally for measuring but, in Europe, converted to staves for pilgrimage and/or farm work), Venus's Cups (originally for feasting but Christianized to indicate worship), Mars's Swords, the Sun's golden Coins.

HERMETIC TRUMP CARDS

The Renaissance revived ancient Hermetism, a blend of Greek Platonism and Egyptian religion. The Tarot's inventors, probably at the Visconti court in Milan, augmented the common suits with Queens and trumps. The symbolism reveals two phases of development, and they accord with historical records. The first fourteen trumps, ranging from the Juggler to Temperance, were devised by 1440. They satisfy a program that is coherent but certainly complex. Then, by 1465, the program was extended

by yet another septenary of trumps. All of them were intended to emulate Egyptian hieroglyphs, regarded as polysemous—having multiple layers of meaning. All of the trumps participate in each level; each level is complete, and all the levels are compatible.

Mystagogy. The first seven trumps chart the descent of the soul from the archetypal realm. The next septenary charts the soul's probation during mortal life. It is ruled by seven Ousiarchs (Rulers of Existence). The added septenary charts the soul's ascent in the afterlife.

Astrolatry. The first two septenaries personify a horoscope having certain points (12 ancient lots, plus the Midheaven and the Ascendant). The added septenary personifies the classical planets in their "joy."

Arithmology. The first two septenaries consist of the Pythagorean Decad plus a bonus Tetrad (trumps 11, 12, 13, 14). The added septenary extends the Tetrad to create another Decad plus the all-embracing World card.

On the other levels, the World card of the *Tarot de Marseille* represents the mystical World Soul and Jupiter's astrological attribution (the Greater Fortune in the Temple of Glad Fortune). Both the World Soul and Fortuna can be represented as a goddess. The goddess Isis can play both roles.¹ Jupiter too can personify the World Soul.

Such intricacy was feasible in fifteenth-century "hieroglyphs," given the culture's expectations. Plato correctly wrote that the god Thoth was credited with inventing hieroglyphs, along with numbers, astronomy, and geometry. Those are the three themes that run through the Tarot trumps as arithmology, astrolatry, and mystagogical symmetries. The Tarot trumps are best explained, quite naturally, by studying certain authors among the Pythagoreans, Hermetists, and Platonists (especially those with a fondness for Egypt). Newly available in the Renaissance were the *Astronomica* of Manilius, the *Hieroglyphica*, and the complete works of Plato. Also relevant were texts that never had been lost: *Asclepius* and works by Apuleius, Macrobius, and certain Pythagoreans.

FIRST SEPTENARY OF TRUMPS

Soul's Descent	Numbers	Astrology	"Hieroglyphs"
Bagatto: Good Demon	1 Unity, Beginning	Lot of Risk: Experiment (i.e., life)	Hand: Enjoying Creativity
Popess: Prudence, Wisdom	2 Thought, Discernment	Lot of Character: Self, Family	Book: Heritage
Empress: "Majesty"	3 Generation	Lot of Parenthood: Motherhood	Vulture: Motherhood
Emperor: "Power"	4 Materialization	Lot of Nobility: Rule, Reputation	Eagle: Merciless King
Pope: Beatitude	5 Universality, Blessing	Lot of Faith: Civil Conduct	Stole (Vestments): Governance
Love: Love	6 Perfect (Complete)	Lot of Marriage: Partnership	Laurel Crown: Attainment
Chariot: Incarnation	7 "Vehicle"	Lot of War: Conflict, Travel	Armor: Victory, Trophy

SECOND SEPTENARY OF TRUMPS

Probation	Numbers	Astrology	"Hieroglyphs"
Justice: <i>Sol Justitiae</i>	8 Law	Midheaven: Law, Justice	Concentric Circles: Solar Signs and Middle Way
Hermit: Lord of Horoscopes	9 "Horizon"	Ascendant (on horizon): <i>Horoscopus</i>	Man with Hours: <i>Horoscopus</i> (astrologer)
Wheel: Fortune	10 Transition	Lot of Fortune: Material Possessions	Baboons: Cyclical Change
Strength: Second Unity	10 + 1 New Unity	Lot of Effort: Exertion	Lion: Strength
Hanged Man: Dispensator	10 + 2 Conflict	Lot of Litigation: Penalty	Ladder: Siege, Suffering (?)
Death: Pluto	10 + 3 Physical Completion	Lot of Duration: Unsafe, Unsound	Mask: <i>Larva</i> , Specter
Temperance: Kore	10 + 4 or 7 + 7 Transformation	Lot of Health: Healing	Water Descending: Rejuvenation

THIRD SEPTENARY OF TRUMPS

Soul's Ascent	Numbers	Astrology	"Hieroglyphs"
Devil: Chief Demon	10 + 5 Universality	Saturn in Temple of <i>Demonium</i>	Goat/Oryx/Bat: Sordid/Profane/Impudent
Tower: Punishment	10 + 6 Purgation/Perfection	Mars in the Gate of Suffering	Thunder: Distant Voice (of God?)
Star: Providence	10 + 7 Soul Transfigured	Venus (Lesser Fortune) in Temple of Fortune	Star: Fortune, Providence
Moon: Error	10 + 8 Danger	Moon in Temple of the Goddess	Canines: "Between dog and wolf"
Sun: Illumination	10 + 9 Spirit Restored	Sun in Temple of the God	Welcoming Gesture: Concord
Angel: Sagacity	10 + 10 Spiritual Change	Mercury in Temple of the Ascendant	Wings: Wind, Spirit (?)
World: Eternity, World Soul	10 + 11 or 20 + 1 Complete Unity	Jupiter (Greater Fortune) (note Tetramorphs as Zeus) in Temple of Glad Fortune	Isis: Radiant goddess called Good Fortune

Without the aid of special books, the Tarot's symbols are elusive to the casual viewer and to the the educated viewer, too. The latter can easily overlook the trumps' esoteric potential because most of them conform to Western iconography and seem deceptively familiar. The enigma of the trumps' symbolism lies in the particular choice of images and their peculiar order. My tabulation of the symbolism vouches for the *T de M* as the best exemplar of the trumps.

CABALISTIC SUIT-SIGNS

The Tarot's four suit-signs happen to resemble symbols favored by European cabalists. Joseph Gikatilla (1248–1325?), in his *Gates of Light*, frequently uses the symbols of Cups and Swords. He does not use Batons and Coins, but he does use Branches and Treasure. I think that the

coincidence led cabalists eventually to graft key words from Gikatilla's text onto the Tarot's numeral cards.

CABALISTIC NUMERAL CARDS

Cabalism was not part of the first Tarot but must have been installed in the early 1700s (early enough for the meanings to have been applied to the Italian suits and then transferred to the French piquet suits, and early enough for the process to have been forgotten and then rediscovered; the renovator was Etteilla). According to my theory, the cartomantic meanings of the numeral cards coordinate with the *sephiroth* as analyzed in *Gates of Light*. There we find the equivalents of Etteilla's key terms for all of his numeral cards, when dealt upright and when dealt inverted. In the following chart, the letter *R* indicates those "reversed" meanings. Gikatilla frequently cites Hebrew scripture, and the essence of certain passages carries through to the meanings of certain cards. Scriptural terms here are italicized. For the biblical references, see [chapter 11](#).

WANDS = MATERIAL CHALLENGES
Gikatilla uses branches to symbolize work and duty.
(R = Reversed)

Card	Etteilla	Gikatilla	Sephirah
10	FALSITY	UNFAITHFUL	<i>Malkuth</i> (Kingdom)
R	FORTIFICATION	FORTITUDE	
9	SLOWDOWN	CEASING	<i>Yesod</i> (Foundation)
R	CALAMITY	CALAMITOUS	
8	BATTLEFIELD	WAR	<i>Hod</i> (Honor)
R	REPENT	REPENT	
8↑ and 7↓ are Heavenly Counsel (war, prayer, negotiation)			
7	CONFERENCE	CONFERRED	<i>Netzach</i> (Victory)
R	INDECISION	INDECISIVE	

6	HOME, DOMESTIC	<i>SERVANT</i>	<i>Tiphereth</i> (time-space: “here” = home)
R	<i>AWAITING</i>	<i>AWAITING</i>	
5	GOLD	<i>GOLDEN</i>	<i>Din</i> (Judgment) (sphere of gold)
R	DISPUTES	DISPUTANTS	

5↑ and 4↓ are the Heavenly Court

4	<i>COVENANT</i>	<i>COVENANT</i>	<i>Chesed</i> (Mercy)
R	<i>INCREASE</i>	<i>INCREASE</i>	
3	EFFORT	REPAIR	<i>Binah</i> (Understanding)
R	TROUBLES END	<i>REST FOREVER</i>	

3↑ and 2↓ are the Path of Love

2	DESOLATION	<i>DESTITUTION</i>	<i>Chokmah</i> (Wisdom)
R	MIRACLE	MIRACLE	
Ace	ORIGIN	ORIGIN	<i>Kether</i> (Crown) (likened to Eden)
R	FALL	FALL	

CUPS = SPIRITUAL BLESSING
Gikatilla uses vessels as symbols of blessing.

Card	Etteilla	Gikatilla	<i>Sephirah</i>
10	RESIDENCE	<i>RESIDE</i>	<i>Malkuth</i> (Kingdom)
R	INDIGNATION	ALIENATION	
9	SUCCESS	<i>SAVES</i> (rescues)	<i>Yesod</i> (Foundation)
R	GOOD FAITH	<i>RIGHTEOUS</i>	
8	HONOR	HONOR	<i>Hod</i> (Honor)
R	RESTORATION	REGENERATIVE	

8↑ and 7↓ are Heavenly Counsel (prayer, thanksgiving, prophecy)

7	THOUGHT	<i>THOUGHTS</i>	<i>Netzach</i> (Victory)
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R	PLAN	PLAN	
6	PRECEDING	PRECEDE	<i>Tiphereth</i> (time-space: “back then”)
R	REPRODUCTION	DESCENDANTS	
5	LEGACY	LEGACY	<i>Din</i> (Judgment) (sphere of rewards)
R	ANCESTRY	<i>FOREFATHERS</i>	
5↑ and 4↓ are the Heavenly Court			
4	CONCERN	WARNING	<i>Chesed</i> (Mercy)
R	SIGN	GOD’S SEAL	
3	ACHIEVED	OUTCOME	<i>Binah</i> (Understanding)
R	COMPLETION	COMPLETE	
3↑ and 2↓ are the Path of Love			
2	LOVE	LOVE	<i>Chokmah</i> (Wisdom)
R	DESIRE	DESIRES	
Ace	ABUNDANCE	FULFILLMENT	<i>Kether</i> (Crown)
R	TRANSMUTATION	TRANSFORMATION	

SWORDS = SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES
Gikatilla uses swords as symbols of affliction.

Card	Etteilla	Gikatilla	<i>Sephirah</i>
10	<i>AFFLICTION</i>	<i>AFFLICTION</i>	<i>Malkuth</i> (Kingdom)
R	GRACE	GRACE	
9	CULT	DEMONS	<i>Yesod</i> (Foundation)
R	SHAME	DESPISED	
8	CRISIS	ENDPOINT	<i>Hod</i> (Honor)
R	OPPOSITION	OPPOSED	

8↑ and 7↓ are Heavenly Counsel (war, negotiation, prayer)

7	WISH, SCHEME	WISHES	<i>Netzach</i> (Victory)
R	COUNSEL	COUNSEL	
6	VOYAGE	VOYAGING	<i>Tiphereth</i> (time-space: “there”)
R	DECLARATION	DECLARATION	
5	LOSS	SACRIFICE	<i>Din</i> (Judgment)
R	TORMENT	TORMENT	
5↑ and 4↓ are the Heavenly Court			
4	SOLITUDE	ONE SAINT	<i>Chesed</i> (Mercy) (Lone sages redeem us.)
R	RESTRICTIONS	RESTRICTIONS	
3	SEPARATION	<i>CUT OFF</i>	<i>Binah</i> (Understanding)
R	ERROR	ERRORS	
3↑ and 2↓ are the Path of Love			
2	ATTACHMENT	ATTACHED	<i>Chokmah</i> (Wisdom)
R	DUPLICITY	<i>PERVERSE</i>	
Ace	FURY	<i>FORCES</i>	<i>Kether</i> (Crown)
R	MULTIPLICITY	MULTITUDES	

COINS = MATERIAL BLESSINGS
Gikatilla uses treasures and riches as symbols of blessing.

Card	Etteilla	Gikatilla	<i>Sephirah</i>
10	<i>LINEAGE</i>	<i>LINEAGE</i>	<i>Malkuth</i> (Kingdom)
R	<i>FORTUNE</i>	<i>FORTUNE</i>	
9	REALIZATION	FULL	<i>Yesod</i> (Foundation)
R	VOIDED	EMPTY	
8	MYSTERY	MYSTERY	<i>Hod</i> (Honor)
R	MORE	AGGRANDIZED	

8↑ and 7↓ are Heavenly Counsel (mystery, victory, prayer)

7	SILVER, PURITY	PURE	Netzach (Victory)
R	DIFFIDENCE	DIFFIDENCE	
6	NOW	NOW	Tiphereth (time-space: “now”)
R	DESIRE	HEART’S DESIRE	
5	LOVE	COMPASSION	Din (Judgment) (punishment withheld)
R	CHAOS	CHAOS	

5↑ and 4↓ are the Heavenly Court

4	GIFT	GIFT	Chesed (Mercy)
R	DELAY	DELAYED	
3	RENOWN	MERIT	Binah (Understanding)
R	CHILD	SON	

3↑ and 2↓ are the Path of Love

2	OBSTACLE	TEST	Chokmah (Wisdom)
R	LETTER	SACRED LETTERS	
Ace	JOY	REJOICING	Kether (Crown)
R	INESTIMABLE	NO END OR MEASURE	

A detailed examination of these numeral cards might seem to undercut my belief that, in their upright positions, the “round suits” are blessings while the “long suits” are challenges. However, I think the distinction holds if we allow that blessings must be used with caution and challenges can be turned to positive effect.

SYMBOLIC COURT CARDS

In the *T de M*, the poses and properties of the court figures suggest an explanation of the four ranks. They could represent the Renaissance categories for personality types: contemplatives (Kings), paramours (Queens), activists (Knights), outcasts (Pages). This symbolism is compatible with an astrological system whereby the Kings would belong to the Sun, the Queens to Venus, the Knights to Mars, and the Pages to the Moon. The celestial powers here would be hybridized according to the astrological context of each suit (see [chapter 2](#)). This esoteric symbolism was available in Renaissance astrology.

The cartomantic meanings of the court cards are indebted primarily to Etteilla. He combined piquet fortunetelling with the meanings of the suit-signs in *Monde Primitif* by Court de Gébelin.

WHAT NEXT?

We have come very close to finding that Tarot cards were always intended as divinatory lots. But what did that status mean to the Renaissance designer? In the *Astronomica*, he could read about astrological lots. Renaissance authors referred to Tarot trumps as “lots” when used in character analysis, as in the story by Teofilo Folengo. Bargagli mentions character analysis in his reminiscence about the game of Tarot. Perhaps Tarot divination originally was intended less for prediction, more for self-discovery. That would nicely fit with the symbolism of the “soul journey.” It begins with the Good Demon (Juggler) dispensing personality traits and guiding souls through all the vagaries of their lives. It culminates in the World Soul, who welcomes all human souls back to eternity.

A fuller understanding of Tarot divination awaits us. Paul Huson has recalled an oddity described by Gérard van Rijnberk. He was a Belgian Martinist who treated the Tarot trumps in an iconographical study (competent in the exoteric symbolism but too dependent on Éliphas Lévi for the esoteric symbolism). Van Rijnberk located an Italian poem, *Spagna Istoriata* (*Storied Spain*), published in Milan in 1519 but purporting to date from the 1300s.² The story features the hero Orlando (Roland). Van Rijnberk reports that, in canto xx, Orlando casts cards into a circle in order

magically to locate the enemies of Charlemagne. This sounds remarkably like the legend that Etteilla noted (and later dismissed as “illusion”). In that account, divinatory cards evolved out of the “sticks of Alpha,” referring to a Greek soothsayer, identified only as a refugee in ancient Gaul or Spain. He ritualistically held thirty-three sticks at breast height and then threw them into some kind of circular boundary. Etteilla says that the Gauls, “whenever the sticks fell out of the circle, imagined that they actually saw the retreat of those Soldiers or Generals designated by the sticks.”³ Although Etteilla rejected this legend, it may have been his inspiration for augmenting the thirty-two piquet cards with an extra card. Paul Huson says of Orlando’s sortilege, “This, of course, is only a fiction in which playing cards appear as divination devices.”⁴ Certainly this is a fiction: I suspect, in fact, that the attribution to the fourteenth century is part of the fiction; the poem probably dates closer to 1519. Nevertheless, I would be greatly interested to know more about this reference to divinatory cards. Even if it was written as late as 1519, the very concept of cartomancy at that date would be important in card history. I have not yet followed this lead. Orlando’s divination could be a form of clairvoyance, rather than an oracle about the future. And his divination could connect with a practice having no dependence on a learned tradition such as Hermetism or cabalism.



Too often have Tarotists and academics opposed each other. I hope to have demonstrated that the Tarotist’s feeling for symbols and the academic’s knowledge of history can be combined successfully. The study of iconography is a good example of that combination. The best way is the middle way.

Notes

Introduction

1. Michael Dummett, *The Game of Tarot* (London: Duckworth, 1980).
2. For constructive contributions to Tarot iconography, consult my bibliography for the following authors and books: van Rijnberk, *Tarot: Histoire, Iconographie, Esotérisme*; Moakley, *The Tarot Cards Painted by Bonifacio Bembo for the Visconti-Sforza Family*; O'Neill, *Tarot Symbolism*; Huson, *Mystical Origins of the Tarot*; Place, *The Tarot: History, Symbolism, and Divination*.
3. Michael J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 5.
4. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274B. Translated by Harold North Fowler in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 561ff.
5. H. D. Betz, ed. *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. 2nd ed., 1992), passim.
6. Fritz Saxl, *A Heritage of Images* (London: Warburg Institute, 1957. Reprint New York: Penguin, 1970), 60.
7. Horace [Quintus Horatius Flaccus], *Odes*, 1, 35.
8. The oldest example known to me is in the Bertarelli Collection in the Sforza Castle in Milan. The card's back design depicts Ruggerio and Angelica from Matteo Boiardo's romance, *Orlando Innamorato* (1506). But the face of the card is in an older style and must descend from a fifteenth-century pattern. For photographs, see Thierry Depaulis, *Tarot: Jeu et Magie* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1984), 54.

9. Lucius Apuleius, *Metamorphosis* 11, 15. Translation by Thomas Taylor, *Apuleius' Golden Ass or the Metamorphosis and Other Philosophical Writings* (London: Triphook and Rodd, 1822. Reprint Frome, Somerset: Prometheus Trust, 1997), 209.

Chapter 1—Thoth, Hermes, and Hieroglyphs

1. Clement of Alexandria [Titus Flavius Clemens], *Stromata*, I, 15, 69.
2. Plutarch, *On the Daimon of Socrates*, 578.
3. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 87ff.
4. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, III, 22. Translated by H. Rackham in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 339ff.
5. G. R. S. Mead, *Thrice Greatest Hermes* (London: Theosophical Society, 1906) 3:150n1.
6. *Ibid.*, 144.
7. Cyprian [Thascus Caecilius Cyprianus], *De Idolorum Vanitate*, 6 = *Quod idola dii non sint*, 6, in Walter Scott, ed. and trans., *Hermetica*, 4 vols. (London: Clarendon, 1924–36), 4:5. See Mead, *Thrice Greatest Hermes*, 10, having the same quotation by Justin Martyr or Pseudo-Justin. A comparable quotation begins the second Hermetic excerpt preserved by Iohannes Stobaeus (cited by Mead, *ibid.*, 135. Variations were common, *ibid.*, 136). For the full Stobaeian excerpt, see Scott, *Hermetica*, 1:383.
8. See the Papyrus Mimaut, 591–609, in Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 33–4 (see [intro.](#), n. 5).
9. See Codex VI, 7, in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 298–9.
10. *Ibid.*, 300–7.
11. Julius Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* III, 1, 1; IV, pr. 5.
12. *Ibid.*, V, 1, 36.
13. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* xvii, 4, 8–10.
14. *Ibid.*, xxii, 15, 30. Translated by John C. Rolfe in the Loeb edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).
15. *Ibid.*, xxi, 14, 5.

16. Ibid., xvi, 5, 5–6.
17. Erik Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and Its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition* (Copenhagen: Gec Gad, 1961. Reprint Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 25.
18. Clement of Alexandria [Titus Flavius Clemens], *Stromata*, V, 4, 20. See George Boas, ed., *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo* (New York: Pantheon, 1950, 1978. Revised Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 102–3.
19. Alexander Turner Cory, trans., *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo Nilous* (London: Pickering, 1840), 56–7.
20. Ibid., 143.
21. Ibid., 145.

Chapter 2—Eastern Cards: Interpretation and Influence

1. Esin Atil, *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1981), 253.
2. Rudolf von Leyden, *Ganjifa: The Playing Cards of India* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982), 41.
3. Rudolf von Leyden, “Oriental Playing-Cards, an Attempted Exploration of Relationships,” Pt. 2 of Supplement to *The Journal of the Playing-Card Society* 4, no. 4 (May 1976): 1–32.
4. For a photograph and commentary, see Tim Stanley, *Palace and Mosque: Islamic Art from the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2004), 45, 49.
5. Dummett, *Game of Tarot*, 41 (see [intro.](#), n. 1).
6. Ibid., 64.
7. John Michael Greer, *The New Encyclopedia of the Occult* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 2003), 215.
8. Walter Scott, ed. and trans., *Hermetica*, 4 vols. (London: Clarendon, 1924–36), 4:254, 256.
9. Greer, *New Encyclopedia*, 215.
10. S. J. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1987), 214.
11. Christopher Warnock, *The Picatrix Guide* (Iowa City: Renaissance Astrology, 2005), 3.

12. William Kiesel, ed., *Picatrix, Ghayat al-Hakim*, Hashem Atallah, trans. (Seattle: Ouroboros Press, 2007), 20.
13. Ibid., 205.
14. Ibid.
15. C. W. King, *The Gnostics and Their Remains* (London: D. Nutt, 1887. Enlarged reprint San Diego: Wizards Bookshelf, 1982), 324.
16. Kiesel, ed., *Picatrix*, 126, 134.
17. Franco Pratesi, “Italian Cards—New Discoveries, no. 8,” *The Playing-Card, Journal of the International Playing-Card Society* 17, no. 3 (February 1989): 110. Article discusses earliest cards (*naibbe*) in Florentine records.
18. Dummett, *Game of Tarot*, 44.
19. F. M. Graves, *Deux Inventaires de la Maison d’Orléans* (Paris: H. Champion, 1926), 48, 134.
20. These correspondences supersede an earlier suggestion of mine in *Art and Arcana* (2004), 277–8. I linked Batons to sceptered Saturn, Coins to generous Jupiter. I subsequently recognized the greater potential of lunar symbolism for Sticks and solar symbolism for Coins.
21. Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, Andrea Dykes, trans. (New York: 1970. 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 121.
22. For photographs, see Stuart Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of Tarot* (New York: U.S. Games Systems, 1978), 1:104, 110, 111.
23. Guido Bonatti, *Liber Astronomiae* (Augsburg: Erhard Ratdolt, 1491), 3:22. See Robert Schmidt, ed., *Guido Bonatti: Liber Astronomiae, Part III*, Robert Hand, trans. (Berkeley Springs, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1995), 97–8.
24. Dummett, *Game of Tarot*, 25.
25. W. H. Wilkinson, “Chinese Origin of Playing Cards,” *The American Anthropologist*, no. 3 (1895), 73.

Chapter 3—Tarot Trumps in Italy

1. Franco Pratesi, “The Earliest Tarot Pack Known,” *The Playing-Card, Journal of the International Playing-Card Society* 18, no. 1 (August 1989): 22–32, no. 2 (November): 33–8. Article discusses Filippo

Visconti's innovative deck (not actually a Tarot) executed by Marziano and Michelino.

2. Stuart Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of Tarot* (New York: U.S. Games Systems, 1986), 2:147–8.
3. Ross G. R. Caldwell and Paul Marshal, www.geocities.com/anytarot/marzianobarzizza).
4. For an English translation, see Ross G. R. Caldwell, “Marziano da Tortona’s *Tractatus de deificatione sexdecim heroum*,” *The Playing-Card, Journal of the International Playing-Card Society* 33, no. 1 (July–September 2004): 50–55, no. 2 (October–December): 111–26.
5. See Ross Caldwell, www.trionfi.com. Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, in its article on playing cards, condemns Caldwell’s citation (said to survive in the account books of the Ferrarese court) as “unreliable.” Wikipedia gives no basis for this condemnation. The Wikipedia passage is itself weak, for it refers to the document as one of the first to use the word *triumphi*. In fact, the document is said to specify 14 “figures,” and we are left to decide: What were they, and who requested their fabrication? I have proceeded in the hope that the document is valid.
6. G. Campori, “Le Carte Giuoco Dipinti per gli Estensi nel Secolo XV,” *Atti Memorie della Reali Deputazioni di Storia Patria per le Provincie Modenesi e Parmensi* 3, Modena, 1874.
7. See www.trionfi.com. and www.tarotfragments.com.
8. Ronald Decker, “Correspondence,” *The Journal of the Playing-Card Society* 3, no. 1 (August 1974): 24.
9. The subjects of these cards are nonstandard. The Star, Moon, Sun, and World respectively are two astrologers, who stand beneath a star; a lone astrologer, seated beneath the moon; the philosopher Diogenes, sitting in his barrel and looking up at Alexander the Great*; an infant Ganymede atop a world sphere (see [fig. 6.15](#)). [*Alexander told the cynic that he might ask for any boon. Diogenes’s request was: “Stand aside. You’re blocking the sunlight.”]
10. Fred Gettings, *The Book of Tarot* (London: Triune, 1973), 7.
11. Ron Decker, “The Steele Manuscript,” *The Playing-Card, Journal of the International Playing-Card Society* 17, no. 3 (February 1989): 73.

12. Charles-Moïse Briquet, *Les Filigranes* (Paris: Picard; Geneva: Jullien, 1907).
13. Robert Steele, "A Notice of the Ludus Triumphorum and Some Italian Card Games," *Archaeologia* 57, series 2, vol. 7 (1900): 185–200.
14. Catherine Perry Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards and a Bibliography of Cards and Gaming* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 386.
15. Thierry Depaulis, "Early Italian Lists of Tarot Trumps," *The Playing-Card, Journal of the International Playing-Card Society* 36, no. 1 (July–September 2007): 39–50.
16. Gertrude Moakley, *The Tarot Cards Painted by Bonifacio Bembo for the Visconti-Sforza Family* (New York: New York Public Library, 1966), 86.
17. Ibid.
18. Rosemary Ellen Guiley and Robert Michael Place, *The Alchemical Tarot* (London and San Francisco: Thorsons, 1995), 43, 123; Robert M. Place, *The Tarot: History, Symbolism, and Divination* (New York: Tarcher, 2005), 163–8, 212.
19. Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (New York: Pantheon, 1953), 110, 157, 161, 165; adding to his list: Moakley, *Tarot Cards*, 74.
20. Francesco Petrararch, *Africa*, III.
21. Dante [Durante Alighieri], *Purgatorio* VI, 121.
22. Michael Dummett, "Where Do the Virtues Go?" *The Playing-Card, Journal of the International Playing-Card Society* 32, no. 4 (January–February 2004): 165–7.
23. Francesco Berni, *Capitolo del Gioco della Primera* (Rome: Calvo, 1526), § D. See Kaplan, *Encyclopedia of Tarot* 1:28.
24. Flavio Alberti Lollo, *Invettiva di Flavio Alberti Lollo contra il Giuoco del Taroco* (Venice: Giolito di Ferrarii, 1550), 279.
25. See www.metmuseum.org/toah/images.
26. This scene, with the hero between personifications of Virtue and Pleasure, is typical in the *T de M*, but not other Tarots. The *T de M* apparently was familiar to Fanti's illustrator, an artist working before 1526 and addressing an Italian audience (and probably residing in Italy himself). This strengthens my belief that the *T de M* was

indigenous to Renaissance Italy. Once upon a time, my critics insisted that the *T de M* was a French product of a later century.

27. Place, *Tarot*, 118–125.
28. Teofilo Folengo, *Il Caos del Triperuno* (Venice: de Sabbio, 1527).
Source used: Attilio Portioli, ed., *Le Opere Maccheroniche de Merlin Cocai*, 3 vols. (Mantua: Mondovi, 1890), 3:128–33 [cited in Dummett, *The Game of Tarot*, 390 (see [intro.](#), n. 1)].
29. Girolamo Bargagli, *Dialogo de Giuochi* (Siena: Luca Bonetti, 1572), 77.

Chapter 4—Hidden Hieroglyphs

1. Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 185 (see [chap. 1](#), n. 3).
2. Seznec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 99 (see [chap. 3](#), n. 19).
3. Jack Lindsay, *Men and Gods on the Roman Nile* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), 100; Rudolf Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977, 1987), 116.
4. Iversen, *Myth of Egypt*, 47 (see [chap. 1](#), n. 17).
5. *Ibid.*, 43.
6. For the same folklore, see Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 4, 11 and St. Basil, *Hexaemeron* viii, 6.
7. Iversen, *Myth of Egypt*, 48.
8. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923–58), 1:331–4.
9. Boas, *Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, 16 (see [chap. 1](#), n. 18).
10. *Ibid.*
11. Iversen, *Myth of Egypt*, 47.
12. For a list, see Joan Gadol, *Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 183.
13. For his diligence, see Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1969), 135–7.
14. Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, *The Golden Game: Alchemical Engravings of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1988), 20 n13.
15. Cory, *Hieroglyphics of Horapollo Nilous*, 13 (see [chap. 1](#), n. 19).

16. Renée Watkins, “L. B. Alberti’s Emblem, the Winged Eye, and His Name, Leo,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 9 (1960): 256ff.
17. K. Giehlow, “Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance,” *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen* 32 (1915): 1–218.
18. For photos, see Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration*, 117 (see chap. 4, n. 3); Boas, *Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, ill. 2–10 (see [chap. 1, n. 18](#)).
19. Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943. Reprint Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 177.
20. Place, *Tarot*, 273 (see chap. 3, n. 18).
21. Moakley, *Tarot Cards*, 95–6 (see chap. 3, n. 16).

Chapter 5—Numinous Numbers

1. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 10.
2. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I, 15, 69.
3. Weiss, *Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, 121–2 (see chap. 4, n. 13).
4. For a photo, see *ibid.*, plate 9.
5. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* II, 1, 22ff.
6. Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 63, citing Tertullian’s *Against Heresies* III. Cf. King, *Gnostics and Their Remains*, 255 (see chap. 2, n. 15).
7. For a dozen examples of Prudence with a book, see Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art* (London: Warburg Institute, 1939. Reprint Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), *passim*.
8. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, 123, citing other researchers.
9. Place, *Tarot*, 165, 212 (see chap. 3, n. 18).
10. Henricus Cornelius Agrippa ab Nettesheym, *De Occulta Philosophia* (Cologne: Soter, 1533), II, 10.
11. For an illustration, see Gettings, *Book of Tarot*, 39 (see chap. 3, n. 10).

12. *Ad Herrenium* III, 18.
13. Rachel Pollack, *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom: A Book of Tarot* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1980 and 1983. San Francisco: Weiser, 2007), 104.
14. F. Homer Curtiss and Harriette Augusta Curtiss, *The Key of Destiny* (New York: E. P. Dutton; Washington, DC: Curtiss Philosophic Book Co., 1919), 154.
15. G. R. S. Mead, *Simon Magus* (London: Theosophical Society, 1892. Reprint, Chicago: Ares, 1979, 1985), 9.
16. Ron Decker, “Number Symbolism and the Tarot Trumps,” *The Playing-Card, Journal of the International Playing-Card Society* 27, no. 5 (March–April 1999): 192ff.
17. Lucius Apuleius, *De Platone et Eius Dogmate* II, 20.
18. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977. Revised 1996), 306–338.
19. Stephen Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 1:215–328.

Chapter 6—Astral Archetypes

1. See Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of Tarot* 2:157 (see chap. 3, n. 2); Jacques Halbronn, *Etteilla: L’Astrologie du Livre de Thot* (Paris: Éditions le Grande Conjonction, 1993), 49; Paul Huson, *Mystical Origins of the Tarot* (Rochester, VT: Destiny, 2004), 40ff.
2. G. P. Goold, trans., *Manilius: Astronomica* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), xiv.
3. Phyllis Walter Goodhart Gordon, ed. and trans., *Two Renaissance Book Hunters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 210–213.
4. Goold, *Manilius*, 147.
5. Huson, *Mystical Origins*, 13, 135.
6. *Ibid.*, 136.
7. Pliny the elder [Gaius Plinius Secundus], *Natural History* II, 38.
8. Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1958. Revised 1968), fig. 95.

9. Observe Jupiter in the *Ovide Moralisé* (Lyons, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS. 742, fol. 10 verso). For a photograph, see Sez nec, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 110 (see chap. 3, n. 19); also Jupiter in the so-called *Tarocchi di Mantegna* and its derivatives and antecedents. For a photograph, see *ibid.*, 138.
10. Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* V, 11.
11. Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia*, II, 39 (see chap. 5, n. 10).
12. Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica* II, 441.
13. Kiesel, *Picatrix*, *Ghayat al-Hakim* (2002), 139 (see chap. 2, n. 16).
14. Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia* II, 39 (see chap. 5, n. 10).
15. Kiesel, *Picatrix*, *Ghayat al-Hakim* (2007), 110 (see chap. 2, n. 12).
16. Kiesel, *Picatrix*, *Ghayat al-Hakim* (2002), 124.
17. Kiesel, *Picatrix*, *Ghayat al-Hakim* (2007), 89.
18. Kiesel, *Picatrix*, *Ghayat al-Hakim* (2002), 125.
19. A rooster, rod, and severed head (the head of Argus) appear with Mercury in the so-called *Tarocchi di Mantegna*. Perhaps significantly, *testa* is “clay pot” in Latin but “head” in Italian.
20. Kiesel, *Picatrix*, *Ghayat al-Hakim* (2007), 173–84.
21. I calculate that the Lot of Basis would always lie below the horizon. The Fool thus could acquire some special trait, such as secretiveness or unseen influence. However, some ancient astrologers, such as Vettius Valens (second cent.), computed the Lot of Basis differently and distinguished between daytime and nighttime charts. By day, Basis = Ascendant + Demon – Fortune. By night, Basis = Ascendant + Fortune – Demon. For examples, see Otto Neugebauer and H. B. Van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1959), 9.

Chapter 7—Sacred Symmetries

1. Ron Decker, “Number Symbolism,” *The Playing-Card* (see chap. 5, n. 16), 193ff.
2. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel* I, 10, 48.
3. Ronald O. Decker, “The Tarot: An Inquiry into Origins,” *Gnosis Magazine*, no. 46 (winter 1998): 16–24.
4. Lucius Apuleius, *De Mundo*, xxiv, 341–xxvii, 352.

5. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Λ, 7, 1072 a26-b1, cited by Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism*, 276 (see chap. 5, n. 19).
6. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246ff [cited by Pollack, *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom*, 64 (see chap. 5, n. 13); Decker, *Art and Arcana: Commentary on the Medieval Scapini Tarot* (Stamford, CT: U.S. Games Systems, 2004), 39, 124; Place, *The Tarot*, 110, 113, 138 (see chap. 3, n. 18)].
7. Scott, *Hermetica*, 3:113–4; 4:56 (see [chap. 1, n. 7](#)).
8. At *Asclepius* 19. See Scott, *Hermetica* 1:323–4. In my quotation, the ideas in brackets are present in the Latin original but are lacking in Scott’s translation. He coerces the *Hermetica* to elicit what he wants.
9. At *Asclepius* 27. I have rejected Scott’s editing and have made my own translation.
10. Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 245.
11. Panofsky, *Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 78 and fig. 101 (see chap. 4, n. 19).
12. Franz Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 83, 185.
13. Lucius Apuleius, *De Platone et Eius Dogmate* I, 12.
14. Robert V. O’Neill, *Tarot Symbolism* (Lima, OH: Fairway Press, 1986), 179; Decker, *Art and Arcana*, 62.
15. O’Neill, *Tarot Symbolism*, 149.
16. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, 2–4 (see chap. 6, n. 8).
17. Julius Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis*, 7, 1.
18. Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 355 (see chap. 5, n. 18).
19. Philippus Beroaldus, *Commentarii Apuleiani* (Venice: Ioannes Tracuinus de Tridino, 1516), fol. a, iii verso.
20. Taylor, *Apuleius’ Golden Ass*, 6–7 (see [intro., n. 9](#)).
21. Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis* VIII, 4.
22. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244E.
23. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951. Reprint 1984), 64ff.

Chapter 8—Etteilla’s Career

1. Thierry Depaulis, "Etteilla and the Beginning of Cartomancy in France," *Manteia*, no. 6 (December 1991): 26; Ronald Decker, Thierry Depaulis, and Michael Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards: The Origins of the Occult Tarot* (London: Duckworth; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 74ff.
2. Anonymous, *Etteilla, ou l'Art de Lire dans les Cartes* (Paris: s.n., 1791), 5.
3. Ibid.
4. Etteilla, *Etteilla, ou Manière de se Récréer avec un Jeu des Cartes par M**** (Amsterdam and Paris: Lesclapart, 1770), 73–4.
5. Etteilla's sojourn in Strasbourg was discovered by Thierry Depaulis: see Decker, Depaulis, and Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, 82, 273 n84.
6. Henry-René D'Allemagne, *Les Cartes à Jouer du XIVe au XXe Siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1906), 478.
7. Dummett, *Game of Tarot*, 107 (see [intro.](#), n. 1).
8. Decker, Depaulis, and Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, 272 n16.
9. Jéjalel, *Cours Complete, Théorique et Pratique du Livre de Thot* (Paris: Imprimerie Célère, 1794), 6.
10. The deduction is Michael Dummett's: see Decker, Depaulis, and Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, 66–8.
11. Ibid., 97.
12. Ibid., 100–12.
13. Robert Amadou, "Alchemie et Société Secrète," *L'Autre Monde*, no. 98 (1985): 24–9; no. 99 (1986): 18–23, 57.
14. Ibid., 26ff.
15. Pratesi, "Italian Cards," 36–45; Michael Dummett, "Cartomancy in Bologna," *The Playing-Card, Journal of the International Playing-Card Society* 32, no. 2 (September–October 2003): 79–88; Andrea Vitali, *Il Tarocchino di Bologna: Storia, Iconografia, Divinazione dal XV al XX Secolo* (Bologna: Edizioni Martina, 2005).
16. Etteilla, *Les Sept Nuances de l'Oeuvre Philosophique-Hermétique* (s.l. [Amsterdam?], s.n., 1786. Reprint Paris: Arma Artis, 1977), 57.
17. Decker, Depaulis, and Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, 103–4.
18. Amadou, *L'Autre Monde*, 20.
19. Decker, Depaulis, and Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, 91.

20. Etteilla's *Cours Théorique et Pratique* is said to have gone unfinished: see Dummett, *The Game of Tarot*, 109 (see [intro.](#), n. 1). I have consulted Jéjalel's *Cours Complet*, which is truly complete.
21. Decker, Depaulis, and Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, 108.

Chapter 9—Etteilla's Cartomancy

1. Detlef Hoffmann and Erika Kroppenstedt, *Wahrsagekarten* (Bielefeld: Deutsches Spielkarten Museum, 1972), 10–11.
2. Vojtěch Omasta, *Patience: neue und alte Spiele* (s.l. [Bratislava]: Verlag Slovart, 1985), 125–8.
3. Jéjalel, *Cours Complete*, 14–16 (see chap. 8, n. 9). The same instructions were more widely disseminated by Papus, *Le Tarot Divinatoire* (Paris: Librairie Hermétique, 1909), 36–39.
4. Decker, *Art and Arcana*, 272 (see chap. 7, n. 6).
5. For the same spread, see Jéjalel, *Cours Complete*, 21–26; Papus, *Le Tarot Divinatoire*, 39–40.
6. See Halbronn, *Etteilla*, 28ff (see chap. 6, n. 1). This book reproduces the “Supplement” to the “Fourth Notebook” in Etteilla's *Manière de se Récréer avec le Jeu de Cartes Nommées Tarots* (Amsterdam and Paris: author, 1785).
7. Elizabeth M. Hazel and James W. Revak, “The First Systematic Integration of Tarot and Astrology: Etteilla's Correspondences and Divinatory Method,” *The Tarot Journal* 2, no. 1 (spring 2002): 15–32.
8. “Table” for the Ace of Cups does have a parallel in “Extraordinary table,” a subordinate meaning for the reversed Ace of Hearts in the *Petit Etteilla* of 1791.
9. Decker, Depaulis, and Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, 72 (see chap. 8, n. 1).
10. *Ibid.*, 110.
11. See S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *The Kabbala Unveiled* (London: Redway, 1887, repr. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1926; York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1968); Pat Zalewski, *Kabbalah of the Golden Dawn* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1993); David Godwin, *Godwin's Cabalistic Encyclopedia* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1979,

- 1989, 1994); Ronald Decker and Michael Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot: 1870–1970* (London: Duckworth, 2002).
12. Jéjalel, *Cours Complete*, 72 (see chap. 8, n. 9).
 13. Christopher McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1997, 3rd revised edition), 92.
 14. Éliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, A. E. Waite, trans. (London: William Rider and Son, 1896), 178.
 15. Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia* II, 7 (see chap. 5, n. 10).
 16. See Godwin, *Godwin's Cabalistic Encyclopedia*, 344; Huson, *Mystical Origins of the Tarot*, 62. Both authorities transpose air and water.
 17. Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1990), 177ff.

Chapter 10—Theory: Cards and Cabalism

1. Decker, *Art and Arcana* (see chap. 7, n. 6).
2. Huson, *Mystical Origins*, 157ff (see chap. 6, n. 1).
3. For five examples, see Decker and Dummett, *History of the Occult Tarot*, figures 2–6 (see chap. 9, n. 11).
4. Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *Kabbalah: Key to Your Inner Power* (Livingston, MT: 1997), 38–53.
5. Avi Weinstein, trans. and ed., *Sha'are Ora, Gates of Light* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994).
6. See, for instance, Prophet, *Kabbalah*, 200–19, 235ff (see [chap. 10, n. 4](#)).
7. Paulus Ricius, *Portae Lucis* (Augsburg: Miller, 1516).
8. Decker and Dummett, *History of the Occult Tarot*, 50.
9. On decans in the Tarot, see Huson, *Mystical Origins*, 65–6, 153ff.
10. For Holland's system, see Decker and Dummett, *History of the Occult Tarot*, 51.
11. Arthur Edward Waite, *The Holy Grail* (London: Rider and Son, 1933), 473.
12. *Ibid.*, 474.
13. L. A. Mayer, “Mamluk Playing Cards,” *Bulletin de l'Institut Française d'Archéologie Orientale* (1939), 38:113–18.

Chapter 11—Numeral Cards and Gikatilla’s “Gates”

1. Etteilla’s central imagery for his Two of Cups has been copied from part of an alchemical allegory in *Le Triumph Hermétique* (*The Hermetic Triumph*, Amsterdam, 1689) by Limojon de Saint-Didier. (Or the two images have a mutual ancestor.) For an illustration, see Klossowski de Rola, *Golden Game*, 304 (see chap. 4, n. 14). The alchemical model of course would not have prevented Etteilla or a predecessor from putting it to cabalistic use.
2. Jéjalel, *Cours Complete* (see chap. 8, n. 9).
3. A. E. Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (London: William Rider and Son, 1911).

Chapter 12—Synopsis and Summary

1. If the trump sequence, as we have it in the *T de M*, culminates in “the triumph of Isis,” can we say the same of the original 14-trump Tarot? I presume that Temperance would be the fourteenth trump. The image could indeed be a manifestation of Isis as the replenisher of the Nile. This does not discredit my identification of Temperance as Kore (Proserpina). Apuleius explicitly states the equivalence of Isis with more than a dozen different goddesses, including Proserpina (*Metamorphosis* 11, 2ff).
2. Gérard van Rijnberk, *Tarot: Histoire, Iconographie, Esotérisme* (Lyons: Paul Derain, 1947), 37–8.
3. Etteilla, *Etteilla, ou Manière de se Récréer*, xv (see chap. 8, n. 4).
4. Huson, *Mystical Origins*, 46 (see chap. 6, n. 1).

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- Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 3 vols. Translated by John C. Rolfe. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935–1939; revised 1952.
- Apuleius. See Beroaldus; Taylor.
- Artin Pacha, Yacoub. *Contribution à l'Étude du Blazon en Orient*. London: Quaritch, 1902.
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